



Westminster's Narration of Neoliberal Crisis: Rationalising the Irrational?

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Abstract

The thesis draws upon the work of Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and Norman Fairclough to analyse Westminster narration of the neoliberal capitalist crisis from 2010-2015. It is argued that Westminster parties sought to ‘resolve’ the crisis by intensifying the neoliberal conditions that caused it. This served the interests of private capital whilst inflicting harm and injustice on the less powerful and less wealthy. The thesis centres on Westminster definers’ discursive strategies of crisis narration, which sought to rationalise their ‘resolution’ and maintain hegemony.

This thesis addresses lacunae in the existing literature of elite narration of the crisis in a British context in a number of ways. It is concerned with the comparatively broad scope of Westminster definers’ narration of ‘causes’, responses and proposed responses to the crisis, and the discursive strategies for countering challenges presented by oppositional movements. It contributes an analysis of Westminster’s narration of challenges that began to emerge over the period. This thesis provides a longitudinal study examining the development of Westminster narratives between 2010 and 2015, contributing a detailed analysis of three ‘intense narration moments’: the General Election 2010, the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014, and the General Election 2015. Utilising Fairclough’s framework of critical discourse analysis, it critically analyses a comprehensive data set of 185 texts disseminated by Westminster definers. Texts include televised election debates, radio interviews, manifestos, budget statements, speeches, and posters.

The thesis evidences that false, inaccurate, and misleading representations were central, systematic, and ubiquitous to Westminster’s narration of the crisis. It is argued that Westminster: restricted debate within narrow boundaries that excluded non-neoliberal alternatives and reinforced the ‘necessity’ of neoliberal responses. They identified ideologically advantageous but false ‘causes’ of crisis that had concomitant neoliberal responses and favourably structured Britain’s political agenda and shifted debate onto more neoliberal terrain. They operated to generate misunderstanding of Britain’s fiscal position to justify austerity, and constructed neoliberal responses as moral imperatives. Westminster definers countered challenges by representing parties inaccurately, constructing alternatives as unviable and immoral, and reinforcing an

element of a challenge's narrative but adopting a different framing to redirect Britain towards Westminster's 'resolution'.

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A Critical Criminological Analysis of Westminster's Narration of Crisis

Rationalising the Irrational, Harmful, and Unjust?

2008 marked the commencement of a major moment in Britain's history, the onset of a capitalist crisis, this time, rooted in neoliberalism. In particular, the neoliberal project's generation of dramatic inequality, heavy dependence upon, and deregulation of, the finance industry, and a largely unrestrained prioritisation of profit accumulation driven by narrow individualism and corporate greed, led to the financial system reaching the edge of collapse. Contrary to the tenets of market fundamentalism, unprecedented state intervention rescued finance capital from disaster. The crisis provided seemingly undisputable evidence that the neoliberal project had failed. Rational 'evidence based' thinking it might have seemed, would lead to the end of the project's dominance. However, extraordinarily, Westminster elites, and corporate elites regrouped and, despite crisis, neoliberalism was empowered and conditions were intensified. Rather than addressing the structural causes or attempting to hold to account the most blameworthy social actors, Westminster used the strategic opening to accelerate the erosion of resistant elements of social democratic capitalism and to intensify neoliberal conditions. The consequences of crises were placed on the shoulders of the public sector, the public, and particularly the most vulnerable.

Westminster did not challenge the power of finance capital or seek fundamental reform of the finance industry, and private capital was indeed, gifted further deregulation (see Tombs, 2016a). Banks were rescued at public expense without conditions (which was in sharp contrast to the intensification of the conditionality of welfare benefit provision) and are currently in the process of being sold back into private hands, to date, at a loss for the public (see Treanor, 2015a). Rather than reducing power and wealth inequalities, the Conservative-led Coalition further reduced trade union power and cut welfare benefits, reduced real wages in the public sector, and cut local services. Whilst financial elites have escaped punishment for their role in the crisis, welfare benefit claimants are now subjected to actions more closely associated with the criminal justice system than the welfare state including *trials* by private companies to

determine ‘fitness to work’¹, harmful *sanctions* for perceived inactivity², and coerced provision of *free labour* for corporations³. Westminster responded to a *privately generated* crisis with further privatisation of the public sector, opening up to private capital more opportunities for profit accumulation. The National Health Service (NHS) for example, publicly valued and once untouchable, but gradually becoming profitable for private capital under New Labour, was further privatised. In sum, *neoliberal* elites seized the opportunity presented by *neoliberal* crisis to further implement *neoliberal* conditions.

Whilst the extent of criminality in the crisis (to some degree intentionally) remains unknown⁴, measurements of the harms of responses indicate their extent⁵. Predominantly as a result of low incomes and benefits sanctions, delays, and changes, there has been an increase in food poverty (The Trussell Trust, 2017). In 2011-2012 the Trussell Trust provided 128,697 emergency food supply packages, and by 2015-2016 this rose to over one million (ibid). These conditions coupled with mortgage and rent arrears, expensive private rent costs, and a failure of the state to provide adequate levels of social housing caused increasing homelessness (see Butler, 2016). In 2010 an estimated 1,768 people were sleeping on the streets in England, and by 2015 the figure was 3,569 (Homeless Link, 2016). In 2016 over a quarter of a million people were homeless (Shelter, 2016a). Higher levels of stress, anxiety, and alcohol abuse

¹ Work Capability Assessments collect ‘evidence’ and judge whether an individual is entitled to Employment and Support Allowance, often leading to people appealing the decisions and living with uncertainty. The assessments have caused long-term damage to people’s mental health (see Stone, 2017).

² The Department for Work and Pensions imposed more sanctions than the courts. Its decisions on a claimant’s guilt are made in secret and penalties can include all of a person’s welfare benefit income (Webster, 2015).

³ The coalition government’s workfare programme requires unemployed welfare claimants to provide free labour for corporations in exchange for public funded welfare support (see Staufenberg and Stone, 2016).

⁴ There has been no “thoroughgoing inquiry into the potential illegalities involved in the near collapse of this sector” (Tombs, 2016a: 185). Consequently,

“we do not know, nor are we likely to know, to what extent criminal activity was implicated in the events leading up to the crisis, nor the forms and extent of criminal activity which those companies in receipt of financial assistance continued to engage in even while receiving that assistance” (ibid: 187).

⁵ For a wider discussion of the harms of austerity see Cooper and Whyte (2017).

have been documented (see World Health Organisation, 2011). Between 2007-2009 the prescription of anti-depressants in the United Kingdom (UK) rose by 22 percent and in 2010 doctors prescribed 3.1 million more anti-depressant tablets than in 2008 (Stuckler and Basu, 2013). Austerity policies were a key cause of the 9 percent rise in the death rate between June 2014 and June 2015 (Dorling, 2016a). Whilst the pre-crisis suicide rate was falling, between 2008 and 2010 debt, unemployment, homelessness, and austerity seem to have contributed to an additional 1000 males committing suicide and up to 40,000 additional attempted male suicides (Gunnell et al, 2015). In this period of Britain's history, the concept of 'benefit-related death' came into existence, reflecting the major shift in the role and approach of the welfare benefit system. A system created under social democratic capitalism *to protect the vulnerable* from economic harm has been 'reformed' to such an extent that it has *caused deaths of socio-economically vulnerable persons*. Following a Freedom of Information request by Disability News Service, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) released 49 peer-reviewed reports on deaths following social security claims⁶ (see Butler and Pring, 2016). Raquel Rolnik, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on housing, critiqued the Coalition's 'bedroom tax' policy for making people feel their right to housing was being breached (see Gentleman, 2013). There have also been successful claims brought against the UK government for discrimination in relation to the 'bedroom tax' policy for social housing under the European Convention on Human Rights (Bowcott and Butler, 2016).

Harms of crisis responses have been unjustly inflicted in accordance with structural divisions, therefore deepening inequality and increasing the vulnerability of the already vulnerable (Clarke and Newman, 2012). The poor, the young, the sick, and disabled have disproportionately suffered (see Hall, 2011; Levitas, 2012). "Half of people living in poverty are either themselves disabled or are living with a disabled person in their household" (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016). In 2016 13.5million people in the UK (21 percent of the population) were living in poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016) and child poverty is at its highest level since 2010 (Butler, 2017). In contrast, those with power and wealth have been protected and

⁶ Brian McArdle (see Burns, 2012), Tim Salter (see McVeigh, 2015), and Linda Wootton (see Huffington Post UK, 2013) are three victims who died after Work Capability Assessments deemed them 'fit to work'.

privileged (Beitel, 2010; Peck et al, 2013). The wealthiest 10 percent of the population have become wealthier during the crisis and own 54.1 percent of total wealth in the UK (Credit Suisse, 2014). To highlight the injustice of responses, whilst banks were unconditionally bailed out of crisis with public funds, publicly funded crisis loans for the public were abolished⁷. For Blyth (2013a: 207) the least blameworthy, “those most disconnected from the boom”, have suffered the most. There has been an inversion of the traditional offender/ victim dichotomy, where the least guilty have suffered the greatest punishments.

If the neoliberal project is not viewed as a class project, but evaluated, utilising historical and contemporary evidence, as a vehicle for successful economic functioning, defined as operating without crisis and benefitting the lives of the majority, then its resurrection seems completely irrational. If Westminster’s crisis ‘resolution’ is not viewed as a process for furthering private capital’s interests, but assessed by whether it addresses causes to prevent repetition of the crisis, and whether it reflects evidence about the way to move the economy and the public out of crisis as swiftly as possible with minimal harm, then the choice of ‘resolution’ again, appears irrational. As Davies (2016a: 121, 122) suggests, there is “seeming irrationalism from above” and “a shift to unreason”. “Increasingly it appears...that government are operating outside of the norms of judgement altogether” (ibid: 122). “Apparently impervious to evidence, evaluation or the merits of alternatives” neoliberal conditions, notably deregulation of private capital and austerity, “persist” (ibid: 121). When evaluated as a project for serving class interests on the other hand, ‘resolving’ the crisis with neoliberal measures comes to be seen as perfectly ‘rational’.

Westminster, possessing the significant power to determine responses and to influence public sense-making of the crisis, operated to rationalise the ‘resolution’ disguising its class-based character. Westminster definers narrated the crisis to attain support, and acquiescence, towards a ‘resolution’ that maintained and deepened crisis-causing conditions, inflicted unnecessary harm and major injustices and prioritised the

⁷ The government provided crisis loans to help citizens with living expenses in emergency situations (Citizens Advice, 2014). For example, if a person had been made redundant or had been released from prison and were waiting for their benefits a crisis loan could be used to pay for food and shelter. The coalition government abolished crisis loans on the 1st April 2013 as part of a programme of public spending retrenchment (ibid).

interests of private capital Remarkably, in the period of 2010-2015 they successfully defended the existing project (see Clarke and Newman, 2012; Gilbert, 2013), preventing the crisis *in* neoliberalism becoming a crisis *of* neoliberal capitalism and what Gramsci (2000 [1932-1934]: 218) termed a “crisis of hegemony”.

The Research’s Focus and Contributions

When volunteering between 2010 and 2013 for Citizen’s Advice, a charitable organisation providing advice on debt, welfare benefits, and housing, amongst other areas, I witnessed and sought to help manage the impact of harms that were intensifying as a result of crisis responses. Local authorities were experiencing cuts and legal aid was cut (see Citizens Advice, 2011) leading to reductions in the charity’s funding and therefore less availability of experts and services at a time when austerity policies were also causing more people to require advice. I became deeply concerned about the infliction of harms and the injustice of the burden of the crisis being carried by the most vulnerable. I sought to understand how Westminster definers’ were justifying their crisis ‘resolution’.

This thesis draws on the work of Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and Norman Fairclough to analyse Westminster’s narration of the neoliberal capitalist crisis between 2010-2015. It centres on Westminster definers’ discursive strategies for rationalising their ‘resolution’ and maintaining hegemony, at best in the form of active support or at least acquiescence. The focus is given to their developing narration of ‘causes’, responses and proposed responses, and the discursive strategies for countering oppositional movements’ challenges. The thesis contributes a detailed analysis of three ‘intense narration moments’ (INMs): the General Election 2010 (GE10), the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 (SIR14), and the General Election 2015 (GE15). Utilising Fairclough’s framework of critical discourse analysis, 185 texts disseminated by Westminster definers have been critically analysed. Texts included televised election debates, radio interviews, manifestos, leaflets and booklets, televised adverts, Prime Minister’s Questions, newspaper articles, budget statements, other statements, speeches, and posters.

This thesis addresses lacunae in the existing literature of elite narration of the crisis in a British context in a number of ways. It contributes a longitudinal analysis of

Westminster narration of the crisis between 2010 and 2015. It analyses a comprehensive data set and is concerned with the comparatively broad scope of narration of crisis causes, responses and proposed responses. It presents an analysis of Westminster's narration of challenges that began to emerge over the period. It also contributes comprehensive analyses of narration in the three INMs.

When developing the idea for this research in 2013 a challenge to Westminster's neoliberal 'resolution' did not exist and was not visible on the horizon. The dominant consensus around neoliberal responses continued without powerful opposition. The Labour party, in opposition, indeed remained strongly supportive of the key elements of retrenchment. However, during the research process and towards the end of 2010-2015 challenges began to emerge, challenging neoliberal 'resolution' to varying degrees. They included: the Scottish National Party's (SNP) anti-austerity, pro-social justice challenge in SIR14 NM, the SNP, Green Party, and Plaid Cymru's anti-austerity, pro-social justice challenge in GE15, UK Independence Party's (UKIP) pursuit of 'independence' from the European Union (EU) seeking to restrain the movement of people, and the Jeremy Corbyn-led movement's post GE15 challenge of the neoliberal 'resolution'. Recognising the significance of the challenges in this period, analysing Westminster definers' narration of them became a developing focus of the research. The research, which was well underway, had to be adapted accordingly. It was not however possible to undertake a systematic, rigorous, comprehensive, and detailed analysis of all these late challenges due to limited space in the thesis and time restraints. The Corbyn challenge emerged after GE15 and developed over two leadership campaigns and elections, and a General Election in 2017. The Corbyn-led challenge had to lie outside of the remit of this project. It requires the attention of a further research project. It would be odd however, not to reflect on these developments and so the conclusion gives consideration to the INMs and challenges that have emerged since the end of GE15. These include the UK EU Membership Referendum 2016 and 'Brexit' (Britain's exit process from the EU), the election of Donald Trump in the United States, the Corbyn-led and Sanders-led movements, and the General Election 2017. Ideas for future research projects emanating from this project are also discussed.

Political Science or Criminology? A Critical Criminological Analysis of Political Parties' Narratives

Historically, Criminology limited its concerns within the comparatively narrow boundaries of state-defined crime (acts that breached the criminal law) (Hillyard et al, 2004). However, a social harms approach, whether conceptualised as residing within the discipline of Critical Criminology or in a new “academic space” of social harm or Zemiology (see Pemberton, 2015: 6), expands horizons beyond dominant definitions of crime and includes a whole range of different types of harms not captured by mainstream criminology and the criminal justice system (see Barton et al, 2007; Currie, 2002; Dorling et al, 2008; Hillyard et al, 2004; Hulsman, 1986; Pemberton, 2015). The approach is concerned with: “physical”/ material harms, including mortality and fatality, failures of the state to provide “adequate food or shelter”; “financial/economic harm” including poverty, “regressive taxation and welfare policies”, and ‘mis-selling’; “emotional and psychological harm” including stress, anxiety and depression; and cultural harm, including “access to intellectual and informational resources” (Hillyard and Tombs, 2004: 19-20). It moves away from individualised accounts of crime and gives focus to structural harm (see Barton et al, 2007; Pemberton, 2015). “The vast majority of harms are structurally determined”, as Tombs and Hillyard (2004: 53) recognise: “of course, individuals are responsible at some point, but they act collectively following the dictates of the neo-liberal paradigm”.

Capitalism is “inherently harmful” (Pemberton, 2015: 35). Harm is a “necessary and essential part of the system” (Tombs and Hillyard, 2004: 34). A key tenet of all forms of capitalism is inequality in power and wealth and the exploitation of workers to produce surplus value (Pemberton, 2015; Young, 1975). Crucially the harms of capitalism are not natural⁸ (Pearce, 1976; Pemberton, 2015). Rather, “continuous effort” goes into maintaining capitalism and the state “repressively, organisationally or ideologically” maintains discipline (Pearce, 1976: 56). If corporations, governments, key political parties have a will to end or ameliorate the harms of capitalism they can. Different forms of capitalism have different intensities of harm. States and corporations can install or rollback what Pemberton (2015: 79) terms “harm

⁸ In the Condition of the Working Class in England Engels documented how harms inflicted during the Industrial Revolution including deprivation and disease were not natural but the consequences of a human led implementation of a capitalist form (Pemberton, 2015).

reduction systems”, such as a strong welfare state. Social democratic capitalism was less harmful than neoliberalism (Pemberton, 2015; Tombs and Hillyard, 2004), and the harms of neoliberalism have intensified during the neoliberal crisis. Failure to discuss “capitalist harm” “contributes to the political myopia towards” extensive social harms (Tombs and Hillyard, 2004: 53). Frank Pearce’s (1976) seminal *Crimes of the Powerful* called for Marxist Criminology. This endeavour has created an area within the discipline that is known by the title of his book and is the location of this research.

Whilst corporations play a key role in inflicting the harms of capitalism, states can be complicit and also inflict their own harms (see Tombs and Hillyard, 2004). “Governments...have been pivotal actors in producing inequality and social harm” (ibid: 52). They possess the power to facilitate, inflict, ameliorate, and prevent capitalist harms. They can create, maintain, ‘reform’, rollback or dismantle national health, welfare benefits, and social housing systems. Governments can gift trade unions with powers or take them away. They can introduce, increase, or remove university tuition fees. They can regulate or de-regulate private capital. They can privatise national industries, nationalise industries, and choose whether to exert their energy into collecting corporate taxes. They can protect the rights of immigrants and ensure support for asylum seekers, or not. They can increase or reduce public spending. They can design social policies that inflict harm or improve people’s lives. They have major influence over whether responses to crisis achieve justice or injustice. Importantly they also determine what is officially labelled as criminal and can influence whether criminalisation reflects or challenges existing power relations (see Barton et al, 2007). Key political parties not in government also play a key role in determining the extent of the harms of capitalism because they have significant power to campaign for particular conditions, pressure governments for different approaches, and cultivate public support, or to support the government in their endeavour. Crucially governments along with other political parties possess the power to influence public sense-making and therefore support and acquiescence towards particular conditions. Consequently, for scholars concerned with social harm and emancipation, the practices of political elites are of vital importance.

“It is exactly through the state (at whatever scale) that the position and role of the citizen and his/her relationship with society is defined, institutionalised, and, on occasion, contested and

challenged...If we are concerned with formulating emancipatory policies and strategies, the state and other forms of governance remain key areas for challenging processes of exclusion and disempowerment” (Sywngedouw, 1996: 1502). This thinking about what progressive social change might look like – as well as the possibilities for its emergence – necessitates an understanding of the state’s institutional and discursive power...Serious consideration should...be given to how the state both represents itself and mystifies itself with respect to its relationship to the maintenance and reproduction of the current, inequitable social order, as well as to the mechanisms through which critical voices within and outside the state terrain remain in a process of contestation” (Coleman et al, 2009: 15).

The thesis evidences that false, inaccurate, and misleading representations were central, systematic, and ubiquitous to Westminster’s narration of the crisis. It is argued that Westminster: restricted debate within narrow boundaries that excluded non-neoliberal alternatives and reinforced the ‘necessity’ of neoliberal responses. They identified ideologically advantageous but false ‘causes’ of crisis that had concomitant neoliberal responses and favourably structured Britain’s political agenda and shifted debate onto more neoliberal terrain. They operated to generate misunderstanding of Britain’s fiscal position to justify austerity, and constructed neoliberal responses as moral imperatives. Westminster defenders countered challenges by representing parties inaccurately, constructing alternatives as unviable and immoral, and reinforcing an element of a challenge’s narrative but adopting a different framing to redirect Britain towards Westminster’s ‘resolution’.

Structure of the Thesis

Following this introduction, chapter one presents the neo-Marxist theoretical framework underpinning this research. It explores the relationship between the key concepts of crisis, hegemony, and discourse and particular attention is given to the opportunities crises present, contestation, challenge and their implications. In chapter two the meaning of neoliberalism is explored and key moments in its ascendancy in Britain are discussed. Attention is given to neoliberal theorisation and neoliberals’ dissemination of their theory, neoliberalism’s capture of Conservatism and permeation of (New) Labour, its exploitation of crisis, and discursive strategies for attaining and maintaining neoliberal hegemony. Chapter three gives emphasis to neoliberalism’s seizing of the crisis opportunity, the ‘irrationality’ of the ‘resolution’, and locates the

research within existing literature clearly detailing the original contributions to knowledge. Chapter four presents an open and detailed explanation of the decisions made when designing this research. Particular attention is given to the concepts of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework, the process of distilling the data, and to 'objective partisanship'.

The findings and analysis chapters take the form of three case studies of intense narration moments. Chapter five presents a critical analysis of Westminster's narration of crisis, responses and proposed responses during GE10. Chapter six critically analyses Westminster's narration of the SNP's anti-austerity and pro-social justice challenge in SIR14. Chapter seven critically examines Westminster's narration of GE15 giving particular attention to the narration of the SNP, Green Party, and Plaid Cymru's anti-austerity, pro-social justice challenges and UKIP's drive to restrain the free movement of people through 'independence' from the EU. Finally, the conclusion summarises Westminster's key strategies for narrating the crisis, considers the condition of hegemony between 2010 and 2015 in Britain, and reflects on developments, including INMs and challenges, since the end of GE15 and the contribution of this thesis.

A Neo-Marxist Theoretical Framework: Narrating A Crisis to Attain and Maintain Hegemony

Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning this research. It explores the relationship between the key concepts of crisis, hegemony, and discourse. Three closely connected central arguments are made: crises present opportunities that leaders of the existing political economic project may seek to utilise for intensifying conditions and oppositional movements may seek to use to implement major change, in 'liberal democracies' efforts to maintain hegemony include mechanisms of coercion, but narration is the dominant form and challenges tend to take the form of discursive struggles, and discourses are key tools for gaining acceptance of 'resolutions' to crises.

Following justification of a neo-Marxist framework, discussion and argument develops over three stages. Stage one identifies key features of crisis giving particular focus to the political opportunities they present and the struggles that may unfold to seize them. A key focus of discussion is contestation and challenge and their implications. Stage two explores the concept of hegemony, giving particular attention to the condition of acquiescence and the role of the mass media. Stage three considers the dissemination of texts to direct 'resolutions' to crisis, attain and maintain consent of a form of capitalism, and focus is given to the prevalence of strategic inaccurate representations of reality in official discourse.

A Neo-Marxist Framework

Seeking to challenge harmful capitalist orders and struggle for socially just, equal, and non-harmful alternatives "requires a theoretical perspective that has been constructed for this" very purpose (Tombs and Whyte, 2003: 222). Neo-Marxism contributes analyses of class domination, oppression, and exploitation in capitalist societies and seeks to understand reproduction of exploitative social orders, efforts for attaining acquiescence in a context of harm, inequality, and injustice, and crucially considers mechanisms for challenging these orders (see Jessop, 2014).

Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall's theoretical contributions underpin this thesis. Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and in particular his analysis of the opportunities that

crises present form the theoretical foundations of this research. Hall et al's (1978) seminal *Policing the Crisis* utilises Gramsci's thesis of hegemony and hegemonic crisis to analyse political elite and media narration of the 1970s conjuncture, the crisis of Keynesianism and the advent of neoliberalism. Whilst Hall et al analysed discursive strategies for exploiting a crisis to *attain* hegemony of a *new* project, this research analyses definers' narration for attempting to *maintain* hegemony whilst intensifying the *existing* project and seeking to protect it from challenges, their analysis of definers' roles and relationships, challenger movements, discursive strategies for gaining consent to more authoritarian responses towards 'enemies within', and legitimising shifts to the right, amongst other contributions, have been key tools in this research. Hall's further extensive work on discourse, hegemony, and Thatcherism has been of great value for exploring official narration of neoliberal crisis.

Neo-Marxists recognise that the state is the powerful centre of political and economic decision-making and therefore scrutinise the state and its implementation, maintenance, and intensification of neoliberal conditions (Tombs and Whyte, 2003). In contrast, Postmodernism conceptualises "power as an almost ethereal force" dispersed throughout society with the state as one of many objects that possess power (ibid: 223). It focuses on power relations between social actors of a range of positions and consequently postmodernism may not apportion the necessary concern to scrutinising the power of the state. Neo-Marxism acknowledges that social actors excluded from the dominant class possess power and agency and in particular can collectively be powerful, as both Foucault and Marx emphasised, but for Neo-Marxists the state has central importance.

A 'critical realist' perspective is taken here in the sense that there is a reality and whilst definers compete to frame it, some framings are more accurate than others. It is argued that Westminster in their narration of the crisis did not seek to accurately represent reality. To argue that there is "a mismatch" there must be recognition of a reality beyond discourse (see Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 77). Interpretations⁹ of Foucault's theorisations as "nothing exists outside of discourse" serve to diminish material

⁹ It is important to note that Foucault himself does not deny that reality exists outside of discourse (Hall, 1997). Rather, he suggests that discourses attach meaning to reality (ibid).

reality¹⁰ (Hall, 1997: 73). Fundamental to challenging Westminster's crisis 'resolution' is a need to recognise the reality that harm, inequality, and injustice are inflicted by a powerful state. Differing from Foucault, who was concerned with discourse framed as the 'truth' and its exercise of power in society, Neo-Marxists are also concerned with challenging inaccurate representations in pursuit of progressive transformations (see Tombs and Whyte, 2003).

Defining 'Crisis'

From 2007 it was emphatically communicated in academic, political, media, and public discourse that Britain was in a period of crisis. Meanings of crisis have developed over history¹¹. For the purposes of this thesis, a crisis is an acute or protracted period of insecurity and abnormality for a subject that cultivates a sense of urgency, because it threatens disastrous harm, and it presents opportunities.

Whilst the financial crisis was comparatively acute, it triggered protracted political, economic, and social crises¹². Such crises tend to take the form of impasses with moments of drama (see Gamble, 2009). To recognise the complexity of a capitalist crisis the period can be conceptualised as a *conjuncture* (Clarke, 2010a; Hall et al, 2013 [1978]). Crises accumulate and entangle together in the same period (Clarke, 2010a; Hall and Massey, 2010; Hall et al, 2013 [1978]; Shannon, 2014a), they often trigger other crises (Fink, 2002), do not develop in a linear manner, and are "complex and multi-layered" (Koselleck, 2006: 387). Consequently, they tend to take years to 'resolve' (Gamble, 2009).

¹⁰ For some postmodernists, "truth is a discursive construction"; "there is no possibility of getting behind the discourse to a 'truer' truth" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 13, 18). For them, "it is not possible to gain access to universal truth since it is impossible to talk from a position outside discourse: there is no escape from representation" (ibid: 14).

¹¹ For detailed etymological analyses of crisis see Habermas (1975), Koselleck (2006) and Starn (1971).

¹² Moreover, arguably contextualising the capitalist crisis at a deeper level yet, an environmental crisis has convened in the contemporary moment (see Barragán, 2014; Clarke and Newman, 2010; Gamble, 2009; Klein, 2014). Klein (2014) highlights that if emissions continue at their current rate "climate change will change everything about our world". Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England, has warned that climate change could trigger another major crisis in a key industry – the insurance industry (see Rankin, 2015).

Crisis engenders insecurities and uncertainties about origins, duration, direction, responses, and resolutions (see Boin, 2005; Fink, 2002; Gamble, 2009; Panitch and Gindin, 2010). For Clarke (2010a: 341) it is “underdetermined”, its ‘resolution’ cannot certainly be known. There is also uncertainty whether the *threat* of disastrous harm will come to pass and if so, for whom.

Capitalist accumulation itself “is a turbulent...process” (Shaikh, 2010: 44). The inherent internal structural contradictions lead to imbalances, sometimes several simultaneously, between production and consumption, investment and demand, and work and labour (Harvey, 2011). Hay (1999) suggests that as capitalist crises are thought to be cyclical, they are not necessarily abnormal. Whilst crises are a normal *part of* capitalism, during a capitalist crisis capitalism malfunctions. There is a “disruption” in capitalism’s normality (Clarke, 2010a: 339). It “ruptures the everyday” (Pludwin, 2011: 470), demarcating a period of relative stability from a period of exceptional instability, which closes when a ‘resolution’ and ‘new’ normality is secured. Crises, therefore, mark significant moments in capitalism’s history (Panitch and Gindin, 2010): “dramatic historical pressure point[s]” (Starn, 1971: 15), and “transition[s] between phases of historical-political time” (Hay, 1999a: 317). As contradictions make crises inherent to capitalism, arguably capitalism never truly *resolves* its crises (see Harvey, 2011). Rather its ‘resolutions’ return capitalism to a period of (only temporary) normal functioning before the next crisis hits. The ‘resolution’ then, leads to, and informs, the next crisis (Gamble, 2009; Harvey, 2011).

The term crisis connotes importance, threat, risk, pressure, and urgency (see Edelman, 1977; Fink, 2002; Gamble, 2009; Shaluf et al, 2003). The concept is closely linked to that of disaster but they have distinct meanings. A requisite characteristic of disaster is *harm* whereas a crisis *threatens* harm (see Brewton, 1987; McMullan, 1997; Rosenthal et al, 1991). Whilst a crisis *may* lead to a disaster, they may happen

independently¹³, consequentially¹⁴ or conterminously. In the period of analysis economic crisis and disaster have unfolded conterminously; some have experienced disastrous harm and the threat of further disastrous harm continues. Capitalist crises may *threaten* “slump, depression, polarisation, political unrest, even war, affecting all parts of the global economy and the international state system” (Gamble, 2009: 5). Consequently, capitalist crises are high politics (Froud et al, 2010a). They must be ‘explained’ and the threats must appear to be responded to (Pludwin, 2011; Soederberg, 2008).

Political Exploitation of Crisis Opportunities

Abnormal instability and the perception of threat create “strategic openings” (Gamble, 2009: 66). Starn (1971: 14) suggested that a capitalist crisis “connotes hope for the Left, fear for the Right”. However, they “are moments of paradox and possibility out of which all manner of alternatives...can spring” (Harvey, 2011: 216). Whilst a capitalist crisis has the potential to render dominance of a form of capitalism, or perhaps even capitalism itself, intensely vulnerable, it can also be exploited by leaders of the existing project to intensify its conditions.

A capitalist crisis may threaten “the legitimacy of political and economic order, the presumed social contract which underlies it and the distribution of power” (Gamble, 2009: 37). Crises may be “focussing events” (Birkland, 1998: 53), making actions undertaken for many years without much attention now the focus of public and media attention and high politics. They can, therefore, create contexts more amenable to restructuring political economic conditions (Gramsci, 1971 [1929-1935]). For Gramsci, (2000 [1932-1934]: 208), they create a “terrain more favourable for the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions”. It may become politically viable to introduce alternative ways of thinking

¹³ For example, the Scottish Referendum 2014 presented a constitutional crisis for the UK but it did not result, at that point at least, in disastrous harm for the UK constitution. The 2008 bailout of banks prevented the financial crisis turning into calamity for the UK financial industry. In terms of disasters without crises, chronic disasters, such as asbestosis and poverty, tend only to create crises at the personal level for victims. The culprits of the harm may not experience crisis.

¹⁴ Disasters can cause political crises, where blame is directed and contested (Davis, 2013). For example, in 2005 Hurricane Katrina inflicted disastrous harm in New Orleans (see Dart, 2014) and led to a political crisis for the US government (Moynihan, 2009).

and acting and to elicit consent to the previously unacceptable (see Edelman, 1977; Klein, 2007). As Milton Friedman (2002 [1962]: xiv) recognised, “when that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around”. Therefore the role of intellectuals should be “to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable” (ibid: xiv).

A crisis marks a “state of exception” when exceptional measures can be constructed as necessary, and legitimised (Agamben, 2005: 1). The perception of urgency and threat may provide those in power with the opportunity and legitimacy to respond in whatever way is ‘necessary’ (Klein, 2007). The label of crisis “justifies the actions of leaders and the sacrifices leaders’ demand of others”; the public may become pliable and accepting of change and loss (Edelman, 1977: 44). Crises can “generate the pre-conditions for constituted dictatorship” including: the centralisation of power concentrated in the hands of a few ‘experts’, authoritarian decision-making and coercive responses¹⁵ towards some populations (Rosenthal et al, 1991: 212). Michael Bruno (cited in Klein, 2007: 260), Chief Economist of Development Economics at the World Bank, stated “the notion that ‘things have to get worse before they get better’ emerges naturally”. For Harvey (2005: 190-192), “retrenchment in public expenditures and...attacking the standard of living of the mass population while feathering the nests of the rich can be best accomplished in the midst of financial turmoil and crisis”. Consequently, some may deem it expedient to construct a *pseudo-crisis*¹⁶ or *exacerbate* real crisis. Klein (2007: 256) suggests that John Williamson spoke the “subconscious of the financial world” when in 1993 he suggested actively constructing an artificial crisis to legitimise sacrifice.

¹⁵ For example, in some ‘liberal democracies’ unelected technocratic elites have played key political roles and been primarily responsible for responding to the crisis. In Italy in 2011, Mario Monti, a European Commissioner and economist, was appointed as Prime Minister and largely determined the responses to Italy’s debt crisis (Skelton, 2011). In Greece in 2011, Lucas Papademos, former Governor of the Bank of Greece, was appointed as the Prime Minister and led the response to the Greek crisis (ibid).

¹⁶ A pseudo-crisis, termed “counterfeit crises” by Starn (1971: 15), refers to when powerful definers construct a perception of crisis unsupported by material reality or a crisis is intentionally created in reality. For an example of pseudo crises see Klein (2007) on Canada and Trinidad.

Discursive Struggle to Seize the Opportunity

“No project achieves a position of permanent ‘hegemony’. It is a process, not a state of being. No victories are final. Hegemony has constantly to be ‘worked on’, maintained, renewed and revised. Excluded social forces, whose consent has not been won, whose interests have not been taken into account, form the basis of counter-movements, resistance, alternative strategies and visions...and the struggle over a hegemonic system starts anew. They constitute what Raymond Williams called ‘the emergent’ - and the reason why history is never closed but maintains an open horizon towards the future” (Hall, 2011: 727-728).

For Gramsci, in advanced capitalist societies with their “sophisticated and ubiquitous” “agencies of socialisation” “the dominant ideology...is highly institutionalised and widely internalised” (Femia, 1987: 52). Consequently, drawing comparisons between military conflicts and political struggles, he suggests that those who seek to challenge its dominance should not engage in what he terms a “war of manoeuvre” (defined as a “rapid frontal assault of the adversary’s base”) (ibid: 51). This approach could only ever attack “the outer perimeter” (Gramsci cited in Femia, 1987: 51) of a much deeper and stronger defence and therefore would inevitably lead to “defeat” (Femia, 1987: 51). Rather, a “‘war of position’ on the cultural front” is required (ibid: 53). This approach involves protracted and “steady penetration and subversion of the complex and multiple mechanisms of ideological diffusion” (ibid: 52). Counter-hegemonic ideas must be disseminated and the ideological work of “the agencies of civil society” including mass media, universities, schools must be targeted (ibid: 52). Challengers must be concerned with managing the ways the public think and feel so that “a largely hostile population” confined with the boundaries of dominant ideology does not block the oppositional movement but instead “proletarian counter-hegemony” is created (ibid: 52).

Oppositional movements (which can include powerful political parties and public groups) can form “counter-ideologies capable of challenging the hegemony of ‘ruling ideas’” and may take “the transformation of society as a whole as their object” (Hall et al, 1978: 155). A movement may engage in a “struggle to contest and disorganise an existing political formation” and to secure a level of “social authority sufficiently deep to conform society into a new historic project” (Hall, 1988a: 7). “When the

normal run of things is traumatically interrupted, the field is opened up for a ‘discursive’ ideological competition” (Žižek, 2014: 17). Movements may disseminate a conflicting crisis narrative to influence public sense-making and attain the support required to appropriate the state apparatus and implement their desired changes (see Hall, 1988 [1987]). “Framing contests” may ensue (‘t Hart and Tindall, 2009: 23). “Competing perspectives, narratives and interpretations of events” may struggle to legitimise their ‘resolution’ (Clarke and Newman, 2010: 710). Those who are successful in discursive struggle then seize the power to determine the ‘resolution’ and therefore the ‘new’ normality (although the purity of their ‘resolution’ may be limited by the commitment to governing with consent). A capitalist crisis, or a conjuncture, becomes “the site of political-cultural work” where “the heterogeneity of forces, antagonisms and contradictions needs to be navigated, needs to be directed and needs to be connected into a project for the future” (Clarke, 2010a: 341).

However, “there is no ‘level playing field’ on which such wars of position are played out” (Hay, 1999a: 336). Power and access to public minds cannot be separated (Hall, 1973a). There is a structural gap between those who dominate public communication and those who receive it (Hall, 1973a). However, there are occasionally opportunities for the less powerful to widely share their voices. Elite definers are at the top of what Becker (1967: 241) terms the “hierarchy of credibility”. They hold the position of “primary definers” whose narrative forms the official version or “primary definition” of reality, which “*sets the limit* for all subsequent discussion by *framing what the problem is*” (Hall et al, 1978: 57). Struggling against the dominant is made more difficult by what Fairclough (2000: 127) terms:

“the squeezing out of the public sphere, of spaces where people can openly dialogue over matters of common concern free from the constraints of both the state and the market, and in a way which can influence government”.

Whilst there may be critiques of a project, and individuals and groups may resist they do not necessarily pose a *challenge* to the existing dominant project. For resistance to form a challenge it must truly rival the dominant project threatening its ability to implement its ‘resolution’ and maintain widespread consent. An “oppositional movement” must have an “alternative vision” and importantly significant power

(Harvey, 2011: 227), which privileges it with the ability to widely disseminate a conflicting narrative at the national level. It must be a “powerful counter-veiling force” (Hall et al, 2013 [1978]: 67). It has to “represent an organised majority or substantial minority” and “a degree of legitimacy within the system or can win such a position through struggle” (ibid: 67). That challenges in the neoliberal crisis came from entities that already had some legitimacy in the political system reinforces Hall’s analysis. The degree to which the movement challenges the project or crisis ‘resolution’ may vary from resisting a core element of it, and therefore supporting an amalgamation of old and new, to the whole project and therefore supporting a dramatic transformation.

Leaders of the existing project are likely to work to “defend the existing structure”, seeking to “overcome” contradictions and maintain hegemony (Gramsci, 1971 [1929-1935]: 179). They may strive to avoid a “crisis of hegemony” (Gramsci 2000 [1932-1934]: 218). Leaders may operate to prevent and counter perceptions of its failure in the public mind and counter challenges from movements seeking to seize the opportunity for change. They may work to counter and “fragment counter-hegemonic groupings, whether this means that they are derided, de-legitimated, disrupted, disempowered, surveilled, controlled and so on” (Tombs, 2016a: 20). The degree to which forces “are won over, neutralised, incorporated, defeated or contained” determines the project’s success (Hall et al, 1978: 313).

As capitalist crises may mark periods in which the previously unacceptable can become acceptable, leaders of the existing project may not only defend the status quo but also use the opportunity to accelerate the implementation of their desired actions and conditions (see ‘t Hart, 1993). As “neoliberal restructuring projects” are undertaken in particular national or local contexts a project may accommodate or inherit aspects of previous projects, even if temporarily, if elites are to maintain consent (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 349). Neoliberals then, used the strategic opening of the financial crisis to erode resistant elements of social democratic capitalism and intensify neoliberal conditions. Whilst some oppositional movements may seek a crisis *of* a project, leaders of the existing project may operate to defend it and ensure the capitalist crisis is only *within* a project (see Saad-Filho, 2010). The latter mark moments of *vulnerability* but an absence of a powerful oppositional movement successfully superseding the existing. Therefore the ‘resolution’ of the

crisis is within the boundaries of the pre-crisis ideological project (Saad-Filho, 2010). Neoliberals ultimately exploited the opportunity presented by the 1970s capitalist crisis to supersede Keynesianism and ensure a crisis of hegemony for social democratic capitalism but have worked to make this crisis a crisis *within*.

Crises are widely demarcated as turning points (see Starn, 1971; De Rycker and Mohn Don, 2013; McMullan, 1997) and moments of “decisive change” (Chalozin-Dovrat, 2013: 88). Burckhardt (cited in Koselleck, 2006) conceptualises a *real* crisis as one where the outcome involves major changes where if not everything then much is different. However, the view is taken here that a crisis is a period in which significant change *can* happen (see Davies and Walters, 1998; Gamble, 2009; McMullan, 1997; Shaluf et al, 2003). Whilst capitalist crises *can* be “moments of transformation in which capital typically reinvents itself and morphs into something else” and “the ‘mother of invention’” (Harvey, 2014: 3-4), this is not *necessarily* the case. Capitalism can be renewed and ‘rationalised’ within the boundaries of the capitalist form of the previous normality without undermining the seriousness of the period of abnormality and insecurity (see Harvey, 2011). Crucially, a crisis is an *opportunity* for alternative ways of thinking and alternative strategies to be introduced. *Whether* it leads to a period of revolutionary restructuring is determined by how the crisis is ideologically interpreted, represented, and perceived (Žižek, 2009). Consequently, a crisis is a *potential* turning point (De Rycker and Mohd Don, 2013; McMullan, 1997).

Hegemony of an Ideology

A developed theory of ideology is key because it can help us explain how: “mass consciousness is shaped and transformed” (Hall, 1996: 26), “a particular set of ideas comes to dominate the social thinking of an historical bloc...and maintain its dominance and leadership over society as a whole” (27), “a particular form of power and domination” is stabilise[d]” (27), working class consent to capitalism is achieved, “social ideas arise” (26) that become “a material force” (27), and “new forms of consciousness” are developed that mobilise people to struggle against and challenge the existing (27).

“By ideology I mean the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in

order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (ibid: 26).

When the framework “grip[s] the minds of the masses” it can “become a material force” (Hall, 1996: 27). Ideologies shape particular structures and behaviours organising and developing the social world. They deem some actions right or desirable and others as wrong or undesirable (van Dijk, 1998).

Gramsci’s concept of hegemony explains the ways in which a framework of ideas dominates and unites “the social thinking of social groups” and “maintains its power over society” (Hall, 1996: 27). It captures when a dominant group attains “intellectual and moral leadership” (Femia, 1987: 24). Their ideology directs society determining material conditions and norms (Gilbert, 2013). Their ideas and values inform the coercive state apparatus and are widely shared through the ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 2006 [1968]), therefore gaining “dominance in, over and through mainstream social institutions” (Tombs, 2016a: 20). The powerful’s mental framework underpins the dominant construction of reality, holds significant influence over public sense-making, and can act as a form of “internal control” (Femia, 1987: 24). Its ideas and values are widely accepted across classes (see Gramsci, 2007 [1930-1931]; Whyte, 2007). When these conditions have been achieved “a period of hegemony or hegemonic domination” has been established; the dominance of an ideology has been stabilised (Hall et al, 1978: 216). The majority become:

“confined within the boundaries of the dominant world-view, a divergent, loosely adjusted patchwork of ideas and outlooks, which, despite its heterogeneity, unambiguously serves the interests of the powerful, by mystifying power relations, by justifying various forms of sacrifice and deprivation, by inducing fatalism and passivity, and by narrowing mental horizons. Such social conflict as exists is limited in both intensity and scope...the reigning ideology moulds desires, values and expectations in a way that stabilises an inegalitarian system” (Femia, 1987: 44-45).

In a period of hegemony “there is room for difference, or for a plurality of ideas” (Whyte, 2007: 112). Social actors can transcend an ideology and reimagine an alternative normality (Fairclough, 2010). Alternative ideas created and disseminated by those who are able to imagine outside of the hegemonic project’s boundaries are a

reason why work is needed to maintain hegemony, why capitalist crises can make existing project's vulnerable, and "why history is never closed" (Hall, 2011: 728).

Passive Consent

Gramsci (1971 [1929-1935]) argues that hegemony operates through two modes: consent and coercion. In Britain efforts to maintain hegemony include mechanisms of coercion, but there is a heavy dependence on narration. As Whyte (2007) recognises, Gramsci's theorisation should not be understood as a binary. The rise of coercive force does not necessarily reduce the need for the mode of consent or vice versa. Rather, elites may attain popular consent for more intense coercive practices (ibid).

"The hope of every ideology is to naturalise itself out of History into Nature, and thus to become invisible, to operate unconsciously" (Hall, 1988a: 8). Ideally, for the powerful, the political intent behind structures and the interests they serve is disguised (Hall et al, 1978; van Dijk, 1998). Ideas and practices become "taken for granted" (Hall, 1988a: 8) and discourses attain the status of "naturalised truth" (Pludwin, 2011: 468). An ideology becomes so embedded that it was difficult to imagine and comprehend, or even desire, an alternative form of social organisation (Fisher cited in Fisher and Gilbert, 2013). Their naturalised status frames oppositions as 'deviant', 'political' and 'unnatural'¹⁷ (Jessop, 1974). Ideas and values become equated with common sense obscuring "differences between classes" and establishing "a false coincidence of ideas" (Hall et al, 1978: 156). Ideally, "domination not only seems to be universal...and legitimate (not won by coercive force), but its basis in exploitation actually *disappears* from view" (ibid: 216, emphasis in original).

However, this does not have to be the case for an ideology to be hegemonic. "Consent...can vary in its intensity" (Femia, 1987: 39). As "consent refers to a mental disposition there are weaker and stronger, more passive and more active sense and forms of it" (ibid: 38). Gramsci recognised that amongst other forms, there is an ideal form of hegemony, where there is belief in the project and active commitment, and a

¹⁷ An opponent's ideas are commonly referred to as an ideology to construct them as political and as deceiving true interests (van Dijk, 1998).

decadent form of hegemony, where there is class leadership and the ideology dominates but there is a lack of true public active support and commitment to the cause.

Gramsci argued that hegemony could be attained and maintained for a project that does not serve public interests without ‘false consciousness’. For him, social actors may hold true consciousness, they may recognise contradictions between elite discourse and reality and be deeply discontented but present “moral and political passivity” that facilitates the continuation of the project (Gramsci cited in Femia, 1987: 43). On this view, a lack of, and exclusion from, real alternatives contributes to “pragmatic acceptance” (ibid: 40). Gramsci developed the term ‘contradictory consciousness’:

“the thinking of the common man is neither coherent nor consistent over time; it is instead disjointed and episodic; elements of intellectual and moral approbation coexist in unsteady equilibrium with elements of apathy, resignation, and even hostility. To be more schematic...[he] expresses a great deal of agreement with, or at least passive acceptance of, the dominant conception of the world...but on a situational level he reveals not outright dissensus but nevertheless a reduced level of commitment to the ‘bourgeois’ ethos, because it is often inappropriate to the realities of his class position” (Femia, 1987: 45).

Critiques of Gramsci’s theoretical relevance perceive consent as active and therefore argue it does not capture contemporary conditions (Gilbert, 2013). However, crucially, to argue that hegemony of neoliberalism continues is not to argue that subordinates believe in, and actively support, the project or that there is a ubiquitous ‘false consciousness’. Although as Hall (1996: 39) notes consciousness may be “partial”.

Ideological State Apparatus: The Role of the Mass Media

Althusser (2006 [1968]) considered how social actors come to internalise ideology, how they come to think and speak ‘with it’. He turned attention to the role of discourse in the interpellation of social actors. Drawing upon Karl Marx’s analysis of base and superstructure and aligning with Gramsci’s (1971 [1929-1935]) argument that hegemony operates through two modes, Althusser (2006 [1968]: 97, 158) argued that there is both a “repressive state apparatus”, which includes the police, the military, and

an “ideological state apparatus”, a set of institutions including educational¹⁸ and religious institutions that support the state in the interpellation of the public into dominant ideology. Whilst the institutions do not belong to the state, they “promote the dominant definitions” contributing towards “the tendency towards ideological closure” (Hall et al, 2013 [1978]: 67). Ideological permeation of the institutions makes the ideology and narration appear socially sanctioned and popular (see Graber, 2010). It is a key reason why the hegemonic is difficult to challenge; oppositional movements have to struggle against the dominant definition shared through the agencies of socialisation that institutionalise and internalise ideas and values (see Fairclough, 2010; Femia, 1987).

The mainstream media is a key institution of the ideological state apparatus. It “provide[s] the main channel through which politicians and government representatives communicate with the public (Cameron and Panović, 2014: 66). “Political discourse is to a large extent also media discourse” (ibid: 66). Political elites directly utilise the media as a vehicle to communicate their “messages” for the purposes of attaining and maintaining hegemony (Herman and Chomsky, 1994: 2). Elites “structured over-accessing”¹⁹ of the industry encourages media reproduction of dominant definitions that support the existing order (Hall et al, 2013 [1978]: 61). Elites’ direct engagement with the media allows them to share their messages with a larger audience. For Hall et al (1978: 57, 56), media outlets are “secondary definers”, they interpret news through the hegemonic framework and reinforce “consensual notions”. For Richards (2017), “a partisan media accepted” the terms Westminster placed on debate in both GE10 and GE15.

To write that the media share and reinforce dominant constructions is not to argue that media reporting is homogenous or to fail to recognise that the media critiques elites and the political economic project. Even within the mainstream media, there exist critiques of neoliberalism and endorsements of alternatives. There are occasionally “windows of opportunity” for those who are critical of the project (Spannos, 2014:

¹⁸ Spannos (2014: 372) states the education system “breeds obedience and conformity” to dominant ideology.

¹⁹ The mainstream media relies on statements from ‘experts’ for information (Herman and Chomsky, 1994) and credibility (Hall et al, 1978).

371). However, whilst there may be critical reports, as Beetham (2015: 44) stated in relation to elite corruption, the mainstream media fails to provide “a coherent narrative, which links these different phenomena together” and therefore fails to draw attention to the shared structural context of the individual events they critique.

Over the last few decades, politics and the mainstream media have become more closely intertwined (Fairclough, 2000). “Many significant political events are now in fact media events (for instance, a TV interview with the Prime Minister can itself be a major political event)” (ibid: 3). “Many news reports are compiled from the contents of press releases, government briefings, written records of Parliamentary debates, official reports or the texts of speeches politicians have yet to deliver...” (Cameron and Panović, 2014: 72). There has been a “mediatisation of politics and government” (Fairclough, 2000: 4).

In a crisis, the media play a key-supporting role in ‘managing’ public sense-making (Panitch and Leys, 2006). Berry (2013, 2015, 2016) analysed mainstream media reporting of the financial crisis and evidenced elite over-accessing. Political and city sources were given an “almost monopoly status to define the issues and how they might be resolved” (Berry, 2013: 267). Other stakeholders, such as organised labour, were “almost completely absent” (ibid: 258). Notably George Osborne MP, soon after the termination of his position as Chancellor, became Editor of the Evening Standard newspaper, whilst also holding a major position at Blackrock the world’s largest investment management corporation.

In March 2017, in the days leading up to the Prime Minister triggering article fifty, seventy Conservative MPs wrote an open letter to the BBC stating that its bias was causing it to overrepresent bad news about the referendum and neglect good news (see Cowburn, 2017). This could be interpreted as the BBC inaccurately representing the truth about Britain’s economic position or as political elites seeking a favourable misrepresentation, and perhaps raises a question about the extent to which the BBC were reinforcing Conservatives’ representations. It certainly reinforces the argument that political elites seek to influence the messages channelled through a key element of the ideological state apparatus in order to ‘manage’ public sense-making of crisis and economic conditions.

Narrating Crisis

Discourse is sometimes used to refer to a perspective's narrative of a notion, for example, "neoliberal discourse of globalisation" (Fairclough, 2009: 163). It is also used to refer to a group of statements connected by a theme, for example the 'third way' discourse (see Fairclough, 2003: 4). It may also be used to refer to the language of a field, for example political discourse (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). A further use is in reference to speeches or interviews, and the term 'text' can also be used for this purpose. Discourses are "ways of representing aspects of the world", not only in its current form but they can also form "projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions" (Fairclough, 2003: 124).

"Among the means of power that now prevail is the power to manage and manipulate the consent of men" (C Wright Mills, 2000 [1959]: 41). Legitimisation, concerned with making ways of thinking and acting "*publicly justifiable*" and "*publicly shared*" (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 109, emphasis in original), is an on-going process of disseminating discourses that justify, argue for, account for, and explain perspectives and actions so that they are determined moral and reasonable and become socially accepted (van Dijk, 1998). Through narration powerful definers can convey the ideas and values of the dominant ideology seeking to embed them and ensure influence over sense-making. Ideas and values are taught through, and maintained by, elites' narration of events, issues, periods, individuals, and social groups (ibid).

Attaining and maintaining consent is an intensive process. It involves the construction and dissemination in the public sphere of *many* oral and written texts and images (Fairclough, 2014; Hall and Massey, 2012). As "merchants of ideas" (Stiglitz, 2012: 202), political elites disseminate extensive "chains and networks of texts", including interviews, speeches, debates, and reports (Fairclough, 2009: 176). In countries that are the most 'democratic' governments heavily invest in text dissemination and the public relations industries are largest (Chomsky, 2002). As maintaining consent becomes "more difficult as the economic conditions become more perilous" (Hall et al, 1988 [1978]: 32), narration *intensifies* to prevent questioning, imagining beyond ideological boundaries, support for alternatives, resistance, and challenges emerging, and then if required, to counter challenges. Powerful definers' representation of

challenges is important because it influences public sense-making through dominant and alternative ideas (ibid). Challengers also intensely narrate the crisis to contest the leaders' narrative and influence public sense-making. Definers' texts are "shaped through contestation with...other positions" producing an "embattled language" (Fairclough, 2010: 15). This thesis argues that Westminster definers had to produce texts to counter oppositional movements that were challenging their narratives and adjust their narrative to recognise the growing momentum of alternatives.

Directing 'Resolutions': Including and Excluding Responses

"Natural and social worlds differ in that the latter but not the former depends upon human action for its existence and is 'socially constructed'. The socially constructive effects of discourse are thus a central concern" (Fairclough, 2010: 5).

"Different social understandings of the world lead to different social actions, and therefore the social construction of knowledge and truth has social consequences" (ibid: 6). Texts "can bring about changes in our knowledge (we can learn things from them), our beliefs, our attitudes, values and so forth" and determine decisions that have "political and material consequences and effects" (ibid: 8, 14). "Texts can start wars, or contribute...to changes in industrial relations" (ibid: 8). "Within a particular world view, some forms of action become natural, and others unthinkable" (ibid: 6). Therefore "social transformations", and the absence of transformations, cannot be made sense of "without thinking about language" (Fairclough, 2003: 203).

"The difference between...[which scenarios unfold] is not determined by some inexorable 'law of history' but by the effectiveness of our political ideological intervention, above all the 'theatre' of popular politics and popular conceptions" (Hall, 1988b: 273-274).

"Those who are able to define what the crisis is all about also hold the key to defining the appropriate strategies for resolution" ('t Hart, 1993: 41). Consequently, discursive power is "a particularly 'powerful' power" (Fuchs, 2007: 146).

Framing is a fundamental tool for manipulating crises in ways that legitimise particular responses that serve particular interests ('t Hart and Tindall, 2009; Stiglitz, 2012).

Frames are “simultaneously productive and repressive, working to define and delimit the field of intelligibility, including the truth of the crisis itself” (Pludwin, 2011: 470). A frame has a “concomitant resolution” (Tombs, 2016a: 54). Particular discourses include and exclude or discredit particular ways of thinking and acting (see Fairclough, 2014; Hall, 1997; Miller and Rose, 1990). Dominant ideas about what is feasible and desirable “are always a product and thus an effect of economic, political and social power” (Tombs, 2016a: 33). As Žižek (2009) stated in relation to 2007-8 financial crisis, the ‘resolution’ “depends on how it will be symbolised, on what ideological interpretation or story will impose itself and determine the general perception of the crisis”.

Crisis narration can therefore facilitate “strategic responses” (Hay, 1999a: 328). Hay (1999a: 337) divides responses into four categories: responses that *completely* and directly “resolve the contradictions and failures”, those that *selectively* resolve real causes, responses that resolve the discursively constituted ‘causes’ (there is a response despite the identified ‘problem’ not being the real problem), and “purely discursive responses” where there is no real action. He argues that in relation to state crisis the first option is not viable because it is not possible to remove all the contradictions from complex social, political, and economic systems and the fourth option is not currently feasible because the public possess a level of awareness that means those in power would struggle to maintain legitimacy if the responses were “purely discursive” (ibid: 337). Similarly, Ross (2015: 370) suggests the state may “engage in *satisficing activities*”; going “through the motions by enacting superficial changes in policies, practices and laws” to satisfy public expectations of response. This thesis makes the argument that political elites have identified false but ideologically advantageous ‘causes’ to rationalise ‘responses’ that intensify neoliberalism.

Hall’s (1973b, 1992a) theorisation of encoding and decoding recognises that definers construct a narrative and after production, circulation and dissemination, social actors consume the discourses. As “ideas only become effective if they do, in the end, connect with a particular constellation of social forces” (Hall, 1996: 43), definers adopt discursive strategies for this purpose in the encoding process (Hay, 1995). Definers seek “to find resonance with individuals’ and groups’...lived experiences” (Hay, 1996: 255). As Gramsci [2000 [1926]] argues those who want their ideology to be

hegemonic must understand the experiences and desires of the subordinate and *appear* to incorporate them into their programme and struggle for them. For example, Hall et al²⁰ (1978: 140) identified a number of “core images” of the dominant “traditionalist’ ideology”, which were drawn upon in constructions of crime that held class consensus in England in the 1960s/ 1970s. The images included respectability, work, social discipline, family, and the city. “Together, these images produce and sustain an un-codified, but immensely powerful, conservative sense of Englishness...it also, by its very density of reference, asserts everyone shares to some extent” (ibid 140). Nationalisation of the images helps to disguise the sectional interests neo-conservatism serves, and helps to unite various life experiences and interests within the same framework, seeking to achieve cross-class consensus (ibid). In this way, “‘the English way of life’ provide(s) the basis of ideological consensus” (ibid: 140) or the “cement” of society (ibid: 141).

To attain consent for a project definers may construct a narrative with key characters that encourages the public to adopt particular identifies and positions (see Hall, 1992b; Hay, 1995, 1996; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), for example ‘hardworking taxpayer’. Constructing a moral panic is a key strategy of those working for interpellation (Hay, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). It invites social actors to view themselves as threatened by the ‘folk devil’ (Hay, 1995) and attempts to secure social unity, cohesion, and homogeneity against the ‘threat’ and in support of the project (Coser, 1956). Collectively social actors share disgust against ‘the other’ and perceive themselves as victims of *their* actions (Coser, 1956), leading to anxiety and coldness towards the identified threat. As Hall’s (1979: 15) concept of “authoritarian populism” captures, powerful definers possess techniques to gain popular consent for authoritarian responses to ‘threats’. They may be able to manipulate social actors into supporting the idea that some people are “inferior, deviant or otherwise illegitimate” (Hay, 1996: 260). Through narration, groups can be manipulated into supporting an order that does not best serve even their own interests (see Edelman, 1977; van Dijk, 1998).

Inaccurate Representations: Discouraging Genuine Understanding

²⁰ Hall et al (1978) analysed mainstream media and public letters to gain an understanding of public sense-making in the 1970s crisis.

It has been widely recognised in critical literature that official discourses often inaccurately represent reality and seek to discourage genuine understanding. This thesis evidences that definers have sought to discourage genuine understanding in order to include and exclude particular responses to crisis. The powerful may strategically operate to limit what is known and unknown by the public (Tuana, 2008: 109, 110). They withhold some information, evidence, and knowledge that it would be ethical for the public to know. Some definers “actively work to organise doubt or uncertainty or misinformation” (Proctor, 2008: 8) and misunderstanding. In some cases powerful definers seek to “deliberately” and strategically “engineer” ignorance (ibid: 3). “Ignorance – far from being a simple, innocent lack of knowledge – is a complex phenomenon, which like knowledge, is interrelated with power” (Tuana, 2008: 140). Whereas some are privileged with knowledge and benefit from not sharing it, others are unable to access the knowledge and are consequently disadvantaged (Tuana, 2008). Tuana (2008: 111, 140) termed this phenomenon “power/knowledge ignorance” and “the power-politics of such ignorances”.

Ignorance “intersects with systems of oppression” (Tuana, 2008: 109) and can be a key “political and commercial resource” (Davies and McGoey, 2012: 80). Proctor (1995, 2008), in his case study of the tobacco industry, detailed the lengths corporate elites went to in order to manufacture public ignorance, including the funding of biased research and suppression of undesirable data. Whilst the harms of asbestos eventually became known across Europe and North America (following years of industry denial), in South Africa this knowledge was silenced at the expense overwhelmingly, of black labourers and their families (Braun, 2008).

A number of criminologists have made important contributions on the issue of false, inaccurate, and misleading representations in official discourse, most notably, Cohen’s (2001) seminal work on state denial of atrocities and Scraton’s (1999) analysis of systematic police deception to prevent accountability for Hillsborough. Contributions have also been made on strategic representations by the media. Herman and Chomsky (1995) analysed US media reporting of a range of case studies to argue that rather than providing necessary information for the public to accurately make sense of important issues, media reporting was propaganda for social orders serving powerful interests.

Analysing racial thoughts in the historical moment of Obama's election, Gilroy (2014: 5) discussed the power of a history of "systematic mystification" and "agno-politics".

The prevalence of powerful definers attempting to obscure truth has also been widely recognised in critical work. Walters (2009: 204) states the government "conceals, manipulates and suppresses truth". Sanbonmatsu (2006: 196) suggests in capitalist culture "the destruction of the truth is ...advanced". Panitch and Leys (2006: vii), who suggest, "unprecedented levels of secrecy, obfuscation, dissembling and downright lying...now characterise public life", refer to normalisation of powerful definers' lying as "chronic mendacity". A number of eminent theorists in Criminology have also recognised its prevalence. Cohen (2001: 114) stated "official discourse is inevitably a mixture of blatant lies, half-truths, evasions, legalistic sophistries, ideological appeals and credible factual objections". C Wright Mills (2000 [1959]: 191) recognised that public life is informed by "official definitions...myths and lies". Nils Christie (1981) argued that official definers seek to blur the truth in order to protect themselves and their interests. Howard Becker (1967: 242, 243) suggested that as "things are seldom as they ought to be" powerful definers "usually have to lie"; "officials develop ways both of denying the failure of the institution to perform as it should and explaining those failures which cannot be hidden". Hall (2011: 724) stated, "what corporate spokespersons say...is often misleading, sometimes deliberately evasive double talk, smoke and mirrors 'spin'". For Streeck (2017a: 7) powerful definers' lying has intensified under neoliberalism. He states, "lies even blatant lies, have always existed in politics...however, with the neoliberal revolution...a new form of political deceit was born – the expert lie". He suggests that lies by experts are now used to justify "absurd" decisions (ibid: 7). This thesis evidences that falsehoods, inaccurate, and misleading representations were central, systematic, and ubiquitous to Westminster's narration of the crisis between 2010 and 2015.

Conclusion

This neo-Marxist theoretical framework has explored the relationship between the concepts of crisis, hegemony, and discourse. It has presented the key arguments from the literature for understanding the narration of crisis to attain and maintain hegemony and crucially processes of contestation and challenge. It has argued that capitalist crises present opportunities both for leaders of the existing project and oppositional

movements (which must have power and legitimacy in the political system), and that a discursive struggle between powerful groups seeking to seize the opportunity for change may unfold. It has also recognised that passive consent may be the condition of hegemony. The centrality of discourses for attaining and maintaining hegemony, struggling for major change, and directing the ‘resolution’ has been asserted. The following chapter explores neoliberalism and neoliberals seizing of the opportunity presented by the 1970s capitalist crisis and key moments of the project’s ascendancy in Britain.

Chapter Two

Exploring Neoliberalism and Retracing the British Path

Introduction

This chapter explores the meaning of neoliberalism and discusses key moments in its ascendancy in Britain. Firstly, it details neoliberalism’s key tenets, and recognises points of convergence and divergence between its theoretical and actual forms. Secondly, it relatively briefly examines seminal moments of, what Peck and Tickell (2007: 47) term, the “British path to neoliberalism”. Focus is given to neoliberal theorisation and neoliberals’ dissemination of their theory, neoliberalism’s capture of

Conservatism and permeation of (New) Labour, and discursive strategies for exploiting crisis, attaining and maintaining hegemony of neoliberalism whilst intensifying neoliberal conditions.

Exploring Neoliberalism

“It can be difficult to think *about* them when it has become so commonplace to think *with* them” (Peck, 2010: xi, emphasis in original). Neoliberalism became so naturalised that its presence was not necessarily recognised (ibid). It was just the way of the world, particularly for those who had never lived ‘outside neoliberalism’. Whilst the concept is “unknown and unused by the public-at large” (McChesney, 1999: 7) and its use by a politician is “a rare...event”, it is well used in academia (Peck, 2010: 13). Critics of the *concept* call it “reductive, sacrificing attention to internal complexities and geo-historical specificity” (Hall, 2011: 706). For them, it is used to encompass too broad a collection of values, ideas, and practices to be useful (ibid). Whilst there are variations in theoretical ideas, and neoliberal projects are “neither monolithic in form nor universal in effect” (Sites, 2007: 36), neoliberal projects have a number of key tenets that are prevalent and enduring conditions. Neoliberalism can be an appropriate term for encapsulating interconnected tenets, as long as complexities, mutations, and different applications in different places are recognised. The “historical geographies” of existing projects must continue to inform the understanding of neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2007: 48).

Crucially, “neoliberalism is...not one thing” (Hall, 2011: 708). It is “a theory of political and economic practices” (Harvey, 2005: 2) and a real-world project (or projects) (Sites, 2007). Neoliberalism, building on classical liberalism dominant in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, is a set of theories of how capitalism should operate that is used, sometimes loosely, to underpin the form of capitalism in a particular place.

Impure Real Neoliberal Projects

Neoliberal theory tends *not* to be “fully actualised” in the real-world (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 353). The ideational construction is a “utopian vision”, an “imagined destination” (Peck, 2010: xiii). Neoliberalism is “a long-term tendency” (Hall, 2011: 708). The theory cannot “remake the world in its own image” (Peck, 2010: 7). Rather,

“neoliberal restructuring projects” are undertaken in particular contexts with existing legacies that the project must accommodate or inherit, even if temporarily (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 349). There is not often a “unilinear transition” from one coherent project to another (ibid: 366). Destruction of the old and construction of the new is an “uneven and open-ended” process (ibid: 366).

If elites seek to govern with consent they must accommodate, whilst gradually and carefully eroding, the existing. Augusto Pinochet’s implementation of neoliberal conditions through military dictatorship allowed a comparatively “rapid-fire transformation” in Klein’s (2007: 7) terminology. In Britain, Margaret Thatcher recognised that a slower transformation was needed to manage consent (ibid). Capitalist crisis can *accelerate* accepted implementation. But, even then, attachment to the old may be resilient. “Intense conflicts between preservationist and restructuring orientated political blocs” can be obstacles to the latter implementing their vision (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 359). Strong public support for the welfare state and a fully national NHS meant the neoliberal project in Britain had to work to gradually rollback harm reduction systems. Neoliberals seized the opportunity presented by the neoliberal crisis to accelerate the erosion of welfare support and secure acceptance of further privatisation of the NHS. However, support for challenges calling for an end to austerity and the return of a fully nationalised NHS suggests neoliberal narration has not been wholly successful. This complexity of implementation connotes Polyani’s (1944>2001) “double movement”, whereby marketisation may be resisted by a counter-movement pushing for social protection and vice versa, resulting in limited implementation. These complexities can result in “politico-ideological hybrids” “amalgamations of inherited and emergent institutional arrangements” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 360, 366).

Neoliberal Theory and the Reality of the British Project: Some Divergences

Real neoliberal projects often diverge from the stipulations of neoliberal theory. Neoliberal theory asserts that “open, competitive and ‘unregulated’ markets, *liberated* from state interference and the actions of social collectivities, represent the optimal mechanism for socio-economic development” (Theodore et al, 2013: 15). There is unrivalled “faith” in the ability of free markets (Peck and Tickell, 2007: 29). The personified market (‘it thinks’, ‘it does’, ‘it loses confidence’) is constructed as

‘natural’, rational, and fair (Clarke, 2010a; Hall, 2011; Soederberg, 2010). Theorists view interference in the market as political and unnatural (Clarke, 2010a; Gilbert, 2013; Resnick and Wolff, 2010).

For them, state intervention leads to biases as different interest groups pressurise states to manipulate markets therefore forcing them from their ‘natural paths’ (Harvey, 2005). Market failure is the result of too much interference and from their view, the market should be left to self-correct (Blyth, 2013b). This is in stark contrast to Keynesianism, which argues that state failure to effectively intervene leads to price spirals, inflation bubbles, and recessions (Chomsky, 1999; Resnick and Wolff, 2010) and that therefore, state intervention is necessary to counteract capitalism’s self-destructive tendencies (Resnick and Wolff, 2010).

However, as Peck and Tickell (2007: 31) state, “no matter what it says on the bottle, neo-liberalisation rarely involves unilateral acts of state withdrawal”. “Real existing markets...*require* state intervention in order to function” (Leitner et al, 2007a: 10 emphasis added). “The free economy requires a strong state” (Gamble, 1983: 116). Exploring Marxist conceptions of the state, Hay (1999b: 154) states that for Engels and others the state is “an ideal collective capitalist”. This conception recognises that capitalism and its particular form is not capable of achieving its own reproduction. The state is required to intervene “on behalf of capital in its long term general interests” (ibid: 155).

The state ensures the material conditions required by the neoliberal project (Harvey, 2005, 2011). It dismantles barriers that restrain the market (Gamble, 1983; Hall, 2011; Peck and Tickell, 2007). The state seeks out favourable international trading conditions facilitating “the trans-nationalisation of circuits of accumulation” (Saad-Filho, 2010: 243). It disempowers organised labour (Harvey, 2005) but facilitates the collective action of capital through the joint stock corporation. It opens up new opportunities for capital accumulation (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) through privatising public assets and allowing plunder of natural resources (Harvey, 2005), and corporate access to public revenue streams. It guarantees the construct of private property, its protection, and the means for its exchange. As this thesis recognises, the

state also takes the lead role in managing public sense-making in a way that facilitates the functioning of the form of capitalism.

The real neoliberal project in Britain indeed, involves “not a withdrawal but a redirection of state energies and goals, and constant vigilance to maintain and extend the market order” (Gamble, 1983: 116). In practice, powerful interests shape selective state intervention (Fisher in Fisher and Gilbert, 2013; Gamble, 2009; Harvey, 2011). There is a rollback of “a particular kind of state” and a rollout of a different kind of state (Peck and Tickell, 2007: 29). For example, the state rolls back corporate regulation but rolls out regulation of ‘welfare’. Some criminologists have accepted claims that the power of the state has been mitigated (Coleman et al, 2009) and dispersed (Hallsworth and Lea, 2012). However, “the state never went away” and indeed, “it’s no exaggeration to assert that the global economic crisis...has decisively settled the issue of the continued centrality of the state as an instrument of both economic and social policy” (ibid: 193).

Whilst theorists claim that the market should be protected from powerful interest groups, the dominant role of finance in the British economy²¹ allows it to influence investment, employment, demand, and exchange rates (Saad-Filho, 2010), and crucially its own regulation (Tombs, 2015a). For Gilbert (2013: 17), the neoliberal state promotes “the interests of finance capital and the processes of financialisation above and – if necessary – to the exclusion of all other interests”. This has been demonstrated in its responses to financial crisis.

²¹ From the mid 1980s UK finance’s trade surpluses have dwarfed those of other countries and sectors (Gamble, 2009). In 2013 it was £71bn, two and half times bigger than the US’s trade surplus, and three times that of the third biggest-Luxembourg (The City UK, 2014). “In 2014 financial and insurance services contributed £126.9billion in gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy, 8.0% of the UK’s total GVA” (Tyler, 2015: 1). The finance sector provides 3.4 per cent of UK jobs (ibid). Finance “is so pervasive...it spreads across the entire economic cycle, co-existing with it...from start to finish...finance is *co-substantial* with the very production of goods and services” (Marazzi, 2011: 27, emphasis in original). It has become commonplace for large non-financial corporations, including manufacturing corporations, to gain most of their profit through investment and speculation (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal conditions have also pressured the public into becoming reliant on finance to fund living costs. “Neoliberalisation has meant, in short, the financialisation of everything” (ibid: 33).

For neoliberal theorists the state “must not...take as its objective the amelioration of capitalism’s propensity to create inequality” (Hall, 2011: 706), because, rather than a problem, inequality is the ‘natural’ expression of the meritocratic market. For neoliberal theory, intervention to limit “enormous salaries, benefits and bonuses” or welfare provision is unjust, it undermines incentives and rewards (Hall, 2011: 707).

However, in real neoliberal projects, rather than “forces of nature” “real and often dirty hands” govern the market (Pludwin, 2011: 467). They ensure that incomes are unfairly polarized and meritocracy is not upheld (Saad-Filho, 2010). In contrast to claims of natural forces, “specific moralities” are furthered by the economic order (Tombs, 2016a: 36). “Neoliberalism is more than an economic or political project”, it is also a moral project (ibid: 36). Neoliberal projects combine neoliberal theory with political neo-conservatism, advocating “intrusive government action for the regulation of the ordinary citizenry in the name of public security and traditional values” (Steger, 2009: 56). As the findings and analysis chapters evidence, neo-conservatism favours traditionalist ideals of family, nation, work, respectability, and discipline (see Fisher in Fisher and Gilbert, 2013; Hall et al, 1978).

Neoliberal theory stipulates that the state should withdraw from corporate regulation (Tombs and Whyte, 2010). Wealth creators should be “freed from state interference” (Harvey, 2005: 65). For neoliberals, regulation is a ‘burden’ on business and bureaucratic ‘red tape’ hinders efficiency and productivity (Tombs and Whyte, 2010). They advocate the ‘compliance school’ approach where the state trusts the corporation to apparently self-regulate (ibid).

However, in practice, in Britain Tombs and Whyte (2010: 62) suggest there has been a “collapse of enforcement” and consequently corporate “impunity” has become “institutionalise(d)”. For Tombs (2015: 67), the purpose of the regulatory approach to finance “has been to ensure the ability of the financial system to grow and extract profits”. The financial crisis undoubtedly demonstrates an absence of effective self-regulation in financial markets, yet deregulation and regulatory failings have not been addressed (Tombs, 2016a). In fact, the apparent ‘necessity’ of austerity has been used to justify further reductions in regulation of private capital (Tombs, 2016b).

Neoliberal theory claims that emancipated markets allow entities to compete, ensuring

efficiency, quality, and competitive prices (Crouch, 2011; Soederberg, 2008) therefore helping to control inflation (Harvey, 2005). The state as a sole provider is constructed as inefficient because it does not have to compete to maintain its customers or accumulate profit (Sayer, 1995). For neoliberals, the state must compete with the private sector (Amable, 2011). Some neoliberals claim that oligopolies and monopolies are the end result of competition and now the most efficient “prevail over inferior competitors” (Wolin, 2008: 7).

In contrast, Lenin (2000 [1916]) suggested that ‘free competition’ capitalism would be displaced with monopoly capitalism. Financial organisations would become “powerful monopolies having at their command the whole of the money capital of all of the capitalists...” (ibid: 58). In Britain’s real neoliberal project, a few corporations have attained financial oligopoly (Wilks, 2013). HSBC, Barclays, Lloyds Banking Group, and Royal Bank of Scotland dominate the market (Treanor, 2015b), which makes it difficult for new corporations to compete (see Harvey, 2005).

Furthermore, the oligopolies are then able to manipulate conditions and prices, often at the consumers’ expense. Privatisation of public services has often led to higher consumer prices serving private interests not public (Tombs, 2007). In 2011 the ‘big six’ British energy companies made an average of £30 profit per household, in 2013 this rose to £105 (Bawden, 2013). Their profits continued to rise despite falling prices in the wholesale market (Farrell, 2015). The number of people living in fuel poverty has increased (Wilks, 2013). The state responds to this by using public money to supplement fuel bills (ibid). Since privatisation, prices have risen, quality has deteriorated (McChesney, 1999). The rail industry demonstrates that privatisation and state investment in infrastructure for the private sector serves private interests and *not* the public interest. The state borrows to invest in infrastructure, the corporation charges the consumer *more* than if rail travel was publicly owned and public ownership would not be detrimental to national finances (for a full explanation see Card, 2016; Corporate Watch, 2014).

To gain support, or at least acceptance, of capitalism over its history powerful definers have claimed that the greater the prosperity of the wealthy and the greater economic growth, the greater the prosperity for all (Whyte, 2007). “As citizens we have increasingly been, and remain, constantly encouraged to believe that the ‘success’ or

‘failure’ of business activity matters to us” (Tombs, 2016a: 41). The “universal prosperity rationale” dictates that wealth for private interests will improve the living standards of even the poorest socio-economic groups (Whyte, 2007). Neoliberal discourses continually claim, “a rising tide lifts all boats” (Harvey, 2005: 64). Therefore corporate elites’ pursuit of profit “enjoys an overwhelming privilege as a social goal” (Crouch, 2011: 167).

However, as the rise of inequality during the British neoliberal project evidences, ‘trickle down’ is a myth manufactured to legitimise favourable conditions for finance and corporate accumulation that actually serves sectional interests as opposed to universal interests (Wilks, 2013). The interests of a few are privileged at the expense of the many (Stiglitz, 2012). “The Keynesian bond which tied the profits of the rich to the wages of the poor is severed, cutting the fate of economic elites loose from that of the masses” (Streeck, 2014: 59). Neoliberalism inflicts “stagnating or declining real wages, increasing poverty...inequality”, and suffering for the many, “and booming markets and profits for the few” (Chomsky, 1999: 122). Post World War Two, in the United States “the wealth of the poorest 40 percent increased in real terms” but from the 1980s “the wealth of the poorest 40 percent has decreased in real terms” (Whyte, 2015). In the UK FTSE 100 CEO pay leapt “from around 20 times the pay of the average UK worker in the 1980s, to 60 times in 1998, to 160 times in 2012” (Hildyard, 2015: 177). Over the same period, “the share of total UK income accruing to the richest 1 percent of the population...more than doubled from 6 percent in 1979 to 13 percent in 2011” (ibid: 178). The incomes of the top 0.1 percent are rising four times faster than the incomes of the lowest 90 percent (Perkins, 2014). The five richest families in the UK have the same wealth as the collective wealth of the poorest 20 percent of the population (Goldring cited in Perkins, 2014). This has a significant impact on life expectancy. On average the top 1 percent live for 10 years longer, and a man living in Chelsea and Kensington lives fourteen years longer than a man in Glasgow (Dorling, 2014).

Inequality is often perceived as a by-product of neoliberalism but it is more accurate to perceive it as “the fundamental core of what neoliberalisation has been about” (Harvey, 2005: 119).

“One persistent fact within this complex history of uneven neoliberalisation has been the universal tendency to increase social inequality and to expose the less fortunate elements in any society ...to the chill winds of austerity and the dull fate of increasing marginalisation” (ibid: 118).

It is “the direct result of complex social relations, class power dynamics, and partisan politics” (Pludwin, 2011: 469). Notwithstanding a lack of economic credibility and material evidence the claim of trickle down, continues to be a staple of political elites’ discourses and shapes government policies (Whyte, 2015).

Neoliberal Paths

Neoliberal projects are “geographically differentiated yet transnationally interconnected” (Leitner et al, 2007b: 325). Whilst the central tenets of neoliberalism inform projects across the globe, their form, the extent to which they are implemented and resisted, their path to dominance, and their strategies, policies and discourses, vary. There are a number of different paths to neoliberalism (Peck, 2010: 3). Overwhelmingly they can be traced back to a moment ripe for exploitation that has been seized by a powerful entity. However, this has taken the form of shock therapy by military dictatorship in Chile (see Klein, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Leitner et al, 2007b), “direct military intervention – in [attempted] humanitarian disguise” (Hall, 2011: 716), for example in Iraq²², structural adjustment programmes dictated in the ‘bailout’ of countries in crisis (Harvey, 2005: 29), for example Greece, and by elected governments choosing to seize the opportunity presented by a capitalist crisis to legitimise neoliberal measures.

Key Moments in The British Path to Neoliberalism

Neoliberal Theorisation and Dissemination

Neoliberal theory developed through a “*transatlantic dialogue*” (Peck, 2010: 3). In 1938 German ordoliberal theorists, Austrian economists and Chicago school economists, who had been developing variations of economic liberalism, gathered at Colloque Lippmann in Paris to share ideas (ibid). Although the schools varied, they

²² In Iraq the US Bush Administration, in the name of removing weapons of mass destruction and implementing democracy, exploited disorganisation and utilised their power to privatise public entities, including media and transport, and remove trade barriers that restricted foreign investment in Iraq’s banks (Harvey, 2005: 6).

were united in their desire to challenge Keynesianism and to prevent the spread of Soviet Union ‘communism’²³ (ibid: 17).

Fredrick von Hayek, an Austrian economist, and Milton Friedman, a Chicago school economist, sought to pioneer the theoretical development of a project that would free the market and end an era of collectivism (Peck, 2010). Hayek established the Mont Pelerin Society, of which Friedman was a member (ibid). Foundations and wealthy individuals, including financial elites, funded think tanks and academics to generate and disseminate theories that favoured their political economic goals (Chomsky cited in Shannon, 2014b; Harvey, 2005; Leitner et al, 2007a). In 1955, Keith Joseph, a Conservative who became Thatcher’s key advisor, established the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) (Peck and Tickell, 2007). The Centre for Policy Studies, set up in 1974, and the Adam Smith Institute, established in 1976, developed the IEA’s ideas into policies²⁴ (ibid). A number of newspapers, including the Financial Times, the Daily Telegraph and the Times (Peck and Tickell, 2007), “strongly endorsed neoliberalism” and were “critical players in establishing hegemony of neoliberal ideas and dismantling post war” Keynesianism (Berry, 2015: 3). Hall and Jacques (1983: 9) describe 1974-1979 as “the period of intense political propaganda and preparation for power”.

When the 1970s capitalist crisis struck, those who had been disseminating ideas, when neoliberalism was a “dissenting presence” (Peck and Tickell, 2007: 47), finally had an opportunity to seize dominance. Neoliberals operated to discredit the existing orthodoxy and promote the virtues of neoliberalism²⁵ (Blyth, 2013b) Neoliberal ideas had:

“been scrupulously formulated for this very eventuality...and they had been peddled relentlessly through free-market think tanks, through the financial community and business organisations, and

²³ In Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* (1944) he envisioned ‘state-led capitalism’ leading to communism (Leitner et al, 2007a). He sought to exploit fears cultivated by the Soviet Union’s operations (ibid).

²⁴ Many key Thatcherite policies “including monetarism, the lifting of capital controls, ‘right to buy’ and restrictions on union power ... originated” in these think tanks (Berry, 2015: 3).

²⁵ Von Hayek and Friedman used their platform after winning the Nobel Prize to promote monetarism and neoliberalism (Shannon, 2014a).

through the elite and mainstream media, not least by Friedman himself” (Peck, 2010: 5).

“A three decade process of intellectual institution building and corporate-led knowledge production played a key role in the resulting hegemony” (Sites, 2007: 124). What was once a marginal perspective attained “ideological triumph” and became a “dominant political-economic state project” (ibid: 120), when “at last, political and economic conditions were propitious” (Peck and Tickell, 2007: 38). The rise of neoliberalism demonstrates the importance and expediency of developing and disseminating alternative ideas (ibid).

The Crisis of Social Democratic Capitalism

Ideas developed during the Great Depression by socialist movements, economists, and the Labour party to respond to inequality, which came to be known as Keynesianism in homage to John Maynard Keynes, were operationalised in the aftermath of World War two (Hall, 2011). “A high-wage mass-production industrial economy that included an alliance between capital and organised labour” was established (Radice, 2010: 34). It was an era of Fordism; a period marked by mass manufacturing and consumption. High levels of employment favoured workers who successfully struggled for improved conditions and wage increases (Panitch and Gindin, 2010), which in turn helped to ensure demand (Crouch, 2011).

The state adjusted spending and policies²⁶ to manage demand and balance the economy (Crouch, 2011). When demand was lax the government spent more and when inflation and demand were high it reduced its spending (ibid). The state also managed currencies and international financial flows. In marked contrast to more recent governments, during the period the government perceived its role as:

“intervening in the economy, redistributing wealth, universalising life-chances, attacking unemployment, protecting the socially vulnerable, ameliorating the condition of oppressed or marginalised groups and addressing social injustice. It tried to break the ‘natural’ link between social needs and the individual’s capacity to pay” (Hall, 2011: 707).

²⁶ Leys (1989: 313) describes the demand management as at first “gentle touches on the accelerator or brakes (more often the brakes) through changes in taxation, state spending and the control of credit” and then it became engaged in more “radical repairs”.

It overtly intervened to create a more “social and moral economy” (Harvey, 2005: 11). Reflecting the findings of the Beveridge report, the state designed harm reduction systems, including the National Health Service, the welfare state, and social housing, to protect the vulnerable and ameliorate inequality (Hall, 2011). The state nationalised water, electricity, gas, and transport to improve affordability (Leys, 1989). Parties competed by promoting “full employment and prosperity, accepting a considerable public sector alongside the private, financing high government spending on welfare out of high taxation, and conciliating trade-union power” (Gamble, 1983: 127).

The 1970s were marked by a serious inflation crisis²⁷ to which higher wage demands and high commodity prices contributed (see Gamble, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Lapavistas, 2009). It became a decade of governments attempting to ‘resolve’ the crisis. Edward Heath, Conservative and Prime Minister between 1970 and 1974, advocated state withdrawal from market management (Leys, 1989) and a more interventionist approach to organised labour (Jacques, 1983). Heath “unleashed an ideological onslaught” upon trade unions, and the media “seized on this lead” (Hall et al, 1988 [1978]: 20). He constructed miners, who went on strike in 1972 and 1974 as unpatriotic (Hall et al, 1978; Harvey, 2005). A ‘Red Scare’ was used to cultivate fear of unions and the Labour party (Hall et al, 1988 [1978]). The media engaged in ‘exposing’ “‘Totalitarian Marxist(s)’” in the Labour party (ibid: 20). Daily Telegraph reported on “Communism’s ‘creeping insidious, cancer like growth’” and Lord Chalfont warned of “Communist ‘maggots and termites’” who threatened democracy (ibid: 24). “A key theme of the Heath government...was the need [for the state] to reassert authority and law and order – in relation to working class militancy, crime, student unrest, etc.” (Jacques, 1983: 45). The Industrial Relations Act 1971 introduced a punitive approach to industrial conflict²⁸ (Leys, 1989). Chancellor Anthony Barber “shifted the burden of taxation substantially away from companies and the richer taxpayers and onto the working class” (ibid: 90). “The class character of the new fiscal policy was

²⁷ In 1975 the inflation rate was 26 per cent (Harvey, 2005). To demonstrate the abnormality, in 1970 inflation was 6.4%.

²⁸ It permitted “financial sanctions on registered unions whose members took industrial action other than by prescribed procedures”, enforced pre-strike ballots, and disallowed unofficial and sympathetic strikes (Leys, 1989: 90).

unmistakable” (ibid: 90). There was fierce resistance of Heath’s and Barker’s approach (Jacques, 1983). Britain experienced:

“four states of emergency, an unprecedented post-war level of industrial conflict, high unemployment, high inflation, and the spectacular shipwreck of the Government’s attempt to expand the economy on the rocks of the oil crisis, the miner’s strike, and the three-day week” (Gamble, 1983: 112).

In February 1974 a snap election seeking a mandate to repress the miners, resulted in the fall of Heath’s government (Jacques, 1983).

The Wilson-led Labour government of 1974-1976 (elected as a minority in February 1974 but securing a small majority in October that year) “returned to office...at the beginning of a major downturn in the world economy” (Gamble, 1983: 110). They:

“inherited something of a poisoned chalice. This noxious cocktail comprised: an economy characterised by a massive public sector borrowing requirement; high rates of inflation; rising levels of unemployment, and in a condition of shock following the 1973 energy crisis...a highly politicised trade union movement which was widely perceived as having ‘brought down’ the previous government ...and a widespread public desire for some miraculous mollifications of the trade unions at the same time as radical wage constraint” (Hay, 1996: 256-257).

In attempt to resolve conflict Wilson’s government rolled back a number of Conservative industrial relations policies (Jacques, 1983) and established the Social Contract (Hay, 1996), a corporatist form of “bargain and compromise” (Hall, 1988a [1980]: 134). It sought to create a partnership for negotiation of wages between capital representatives (generally through the CBI), labour (through the Trade Union Congress) and the state as the neutral arbiter between the classes” (ibid: 135). It was part of “the government’s attempt to ensure working class acquiescence in the central tenets of its strategy” (Hall, 1979: 49). The contract was an “incomes policy, first by consent, then by imposition” (ibid: 16). There was an intensification of the “feeling of ‘national crisis’” and the impending recession was used to discipline labour into accepting reduced real wages (Jacques, 1983). “Real wages fell by an average annual rate of 13 percent between 1975 and 1978” (Hay, 1996: 259). Attempts to control

inflation produced high levels of unemployment (Gamble, 1983). The party became seen as an “establishment party” not a workers’ party (ibid: 56).

By 1975 there was a:

“fully fledged capitalist recession, with extremely high rates of inflation, a toppling currency, cuts in the social wage and in public spending, a savaging of living standards, and a sacrifice of the working class to capital; all managed by a Labour government” (Hall et al, 1978: 308).

The UK sought an IMF bailout, conditional on an austerity programme (Harvey, 2005). Working class strength was “systematically whittled away [by]...severe cuts in welfare and public expenditure”. There was growing public frustration (Peck and Tickell, 2007) and conflict (Jacques, 1983), and a period of “managed dissensus” (Hall et al, 1978: 320). The 1970s saw social democratic capitalism lose momentum both “materially and discursively” (Leitner et al, 2007a). The “Keynesian apparatus for the control of recession” was “in tatters” and its proponents were, with great difficulty, trying and failing to construct a ‘resolution’ (Hall et al, 1978: 302). The period, like the contemporary one in Britain as discussed in the thesis conclusion, can be captured using Gramsci’s concept of ‘interregnum’ (see Streeck, 2017a). The old form of capitalism was dying but preservationists were trying to revive it and the new form was still being born. For Hay (1996: 260-261), the ending of the social contract in the ‘Winter of Discontent’ 1978-1979 marked “the final exhaustion of a last-ditch attempt to manage the contradictions, tensions, and failures of a post-war settlement that had been visibly disintegrating”. It marked the break of working class acquiescence that governments had struggled to maintain over the decade (Jacques, 1983). “A growing crisis of hegemony” “challenged the established structures, assumptions and ideologies” (ibid: 52).

The late 1970s marked “a moment of transition” for Britain (Hay, 1996: 253). The arrival of the Thatcher Government marked the moment that the break with social-democratic politics was explicitly acknowledged” (Gamble, 1983: 130) and neoliberal theory began to be operationalised in Britain. Neoliberals successfully exploited the crisis and ensured it became a crisis *of* social democratic capitalism. “Thatcherism aimed for a reversal in ordinary common sense” (ibid: 164), constructing a powerful

counter-hegemonic narrative to encourage the public to make sense through the neoliberal framework of ideas (Hall, 1988a). It emerged at a historical conjuncture marked by a British economic crisis, a global recession, a crisis of the social democratic settlement, and of the Labour government (Hall and Jacques, 1983). It exploited the problems between Labour and trade unions and of wide public discontent.

Thatcher's Seizing of the Crisis

"Thatcher had long been subscribed to the individualist, anti-state, anti-union, anti-egalitarian views of her party's right wing" and she became an advocate of monetarist doctrine (Leys, 1989). She successfully secured dominance of an alternative political economic project through what Hall (1979: 15) termed "authoritarian populism". His concept captured the ideological work undertaken to harness popular opinion and discontent and gain *populist* consent of a shift towards authoritarianism (Hall, 1988a [1980]). In Hall's (1988b [1980]: 151) terminology, the shift was to some extent legitimised by a "populist groundswell". Thatcherism utilised its "'populist' appeal" to gain support for "the imposition of order and authority" (Hall and Jacques, 1983: 10).

Conservatives constructed 'a crisis of law and order' and moral decline through a number of moral panics that generated social anxieties (Hall et al, 1978). Folk devils included youths, immigrants, blacks, organised political student movements then working class power, "political extremism", "trade union blackmail" and "the threat of anarchy, riot and terrorism" (ibid: 321). Texts claimed that the crime rate evidenced the levels of social disintegration and "the threat to 'ordinary people going about their private business' from thieves, muggers" (Hall, 1979: 19).

"Thatcherism as a state project, although conceived long before, was born in the context of crisis during the Winter of Discontent" (Hay, 1996: 254). The winter marked "a protracted wave of industrial conflict" and the language of the Thatcherite project centred on the themes of "crisis, siege and subterfuge" (ibid: 253-254). "'The dead were left unburied'...the 'bins were left unemptied'...'Britain was under siege' from 'militant trade unionists and 'communist leaders'" (ibid: 254). Militant trade unionists were constructed as 'enemies within' holding the country to ransom (Hall,

1979). The media invited ‘us’ to adopt the preferred subject position of victim or potential victim of militant dissidents who disrupt ‘our’ daily lives (Hay, 1996). For example:

“it will be glum if Lancastrians during a water strike have to get appalling diseases, if Merseyside children during the social workers’ strike have to continue to be battered, if housewives in an island blockaded by lorry drivers have to go hungry, if patients deprived of ambulances and other emergency transport have to die, if many more small firms have to go bust, many more workers to become unemployed, more of Britain’s exports and imports have to stay stuck at the docks, if sewage has to run in the streets, hyperinflation has to escalate...” (Economist 1979 cited in Hay, 1996: 269).

The ‘enemies’ signified “the threat to the state, the breakdown of social life itself, the coming of chaos, the onset of anarchy” (Hall et al, 1978: 323). To address the ‘crisis of law and order’ it was claimed there was a need for “more policing, tougher sentencing, better family discipline” (Hall, 1979: 19), and “decisive intervention” (Hay, 1996: 254).

The crisis was narrated by setting “‘the unions’ against ‘the nation’...the ‘sectional interests of workers against the ‘national interest’...and...‘the housewife’ and ‘the family’ against the ‘militant trade unionist’” (Hall, 1988a [1980]: 135) and the non-unionised worker ‘who worked in worse conditions without complaining’ (Gamble, 1983). Thatcher constructed the trade unions as only representing the interests of white skilled males, and unions were not able to successfully counter this construction (Hall and Jacques, 1983). In the 1979 General Election the Conservative party had support from “the City, big capital and the traditional ‘upper classes’” (Jacques, 1983: 45). It had a “cadre” of the “middle classes, the professional groups, the self-employed, foremen” (ibid: 45). It also spoke for those who resented “the organised strength of waged labour”, the “public service workers who [were]...alleged to work less hard” but were paid more (ibid: 171). The “petty bourgeoisie and low-level industrial functionaries” held strong resentment for “‘iniquitous’ trade unions” (ibid: 171). This cros-class support demonstrates:

“the power which popular moral ideologies and discourses have in touching real experiences and material conditions, whilst at the same time articulating them as a ‘cry for discipline’ from below, which favours the imposition of a regime of moral authoritarianism ‘in the

name of the people', which inflicts worse conditions on 'the people' (Hall, 1988a [1980]: 138).

Whilst "there was anger, protest, resistance", there was "also a surge of populist support for the ruthless exercise of strong leadership" (Hall, 2011: 712). "Ordinary people" become "actively recruited into crusades for the restoration of 'normal times' – if necessary through a more-than-normal imposition of moral-legal force" (Hall, 1988a [1980]: 143). This marked "the drift towards 'exceptional' forms of control for 'exceptional' times" (ibid: 138). "Popular consent" for "new forms of statist authoritarianism" was won (ibid: 127). Society moved into "iron times"; consent was given to coerce 'the other' and achieve order (Hall et al, 1978: 323). The consent of the many was secured for "the extension of police powers, for a stiffening of criminal justice procedures, for the suspension of legal rights, for harsher penalties, tougher sentencing policies and abrasive prison regimes" (ibid: 138). However, there was also resistance to high unemployment, repressive policing of black residents, and 'saturation policing' most notably in 'riots' across thirty cities in July 1981 (ibid).

Thatcherism was in essence a "vigorous form of class struggle from above" (Miliband, 1985: 16), inflicting "the burden of economic adjustment on the working class, the unwaged, the social state, and (even) on domestic manufacturing capital" (Peck and Tickell, 2007: 30). It sought to reverse post war working class "gains and encroachments", repress workers' resistance (Gamble, 1983: 126), and replace collectivism with individualism (Jacques, 1983), attempting in particular to erode the popular base upon which the welfare state had been built (Hall, 1988 [1987]). However, from the beginning Thatcher acknowledged that transformation would require more than one parliamentary term (Leys, 1989). Consent to neoliberalism's implementation had to be carefully managed. She made "concessions where necessary...only pursuing those lines of action for which support [could]...be won" (Gamble, 1983: 127).

In order to attain cross-class consensus Thatcherism forged together "new discursive articulations between the liberal discourses of the 'free market'" and traditional conservative values (Hall, 1988a: 2). Thatcher did not:

“promise us the giveaway society. She said, iron times; back to the wall; stiff upper lips; get moving’ on your bike; dig in. Stick by the old, tried verities, the wisdom of ‘Old England’. The family has kept society together; live by it. Send the women back to the hearth. Get the men out to the Northwest Frontier. Hard times – to be followed, much later, by a return to the good old days. She asked you for a long leash – not one, but two and three terms. By the end, she said, I will be able to redefine the nation in such a way that you will all, once again, for the first time since the Empire started to go down the tube, feel what it is like to be part of Great Britain Unlimited...Britain will be great again” (Hall, 1988 [1987]: 167).

Claims of national interest were key to legitimising neoliberal changes and the coercion of neo-conservative enemies (Gamble, 1983), including attacks on “immigrants, welfare recipients and unions” (Gough, 1983: 154).

Thatcher’s Neoliberalisation of Britain

Thatcher constructed the state as an “overgrown and parasitic obstacle to economic recovery” (Leys, 1989: 100) burdening entrepreneurs with regulation, tax, and the power of organised labour (Bleaney, 1983). The government sought to naturalise the free market (Leitner et al, 2007a: 3). Thatcher’s government ensured the dominance of financial capitalism over industrial capitalism (Wilks, 2013). Deregulation of the City of London, marked by the Big Bang of 1986 (Gamble, 2009), facilitated the City becoming the “centre of international finance” (Harvey, 2005: 56). At the same time, the free market, overpricing of sterling, and a short-term approach to investment and strategic planning, and prioritisation of low inflation over full employment, contributed to the decline of manufacturing. Manufacturing jobs were systematically exported (Huws, 2011). Whilst free trade opened British manufacturing to competition, it also allowed for mass unemployment, caused by offshoring and deflationary policies, which was a vital mechanism for reducing the power of organised labour (Harvey, 2005). Surplus labour meant workers had to compete for jobs (Saad-Filho, 2010). Pay and conditions worsened (Gamble, 2009; Huws, 2011), many skilled workers had to accept low skilled and low paid service sector jobs (Bowman, 2014; Shannon, 2014a), which widened inequality (Stiglitz, 2012). Privatisation of public assets reduced trade union members because less private sector employees are unionised (Chomsky in Shannon, 2014b).

Although tightening money supply was prescribed for inflation (Hall and Jacques, 1983), high unemployment led to high welfare spending and falling tax revenue (Gamble, 1983; Leys, 1989). In 1981 Chancellor Geoffrey Howe further raised taxes and cut public spending, increasing unemployment (ibid). The burden of taxation for business and the public was higher two years after Thatcher entered government than when Labour left (Gamble, 1983). In 1982 unemployment was over 3million for the first time since the Great Depression, and rose to 3.1million by 1986 (ibid). Despite these failings Thatcher proclaimed “the lady is not for turning” (The Independent, 2013).

Neoliberalism strongly opposed the “redistributive social protection” of post war social democratic capitalism (Amable, 2011: 7). It was said to dis-incentivise work (Gough, 1983), encourage “‘soft’ attitudes towards crime, immigrants, the idle, the feckless, skivers, the sexually aberrant and so forth” (ibid: 154). Discursive figures were deployed to justify the revival of competition and responsibility (Hall, 1979; Hall, 2011). Discourses constructed ‘the taxpayer’ as personifying good moral values and the ‘scrounger’ as personifying an absence of them (see Hall, 1988a [1980]; Hall, 1988b; Hall, 2011). Thatcher constructed a “discourse of the ‘spendthrift state’ recklessly giving away wealth the nation ha[d] not earned” (Hall, 1988a [1980]: 144). Keith Joseph endorsed the modest, self-reliant, thrifty family and criticised unemployed teenage single mothers for being frequent, and bad, parents (Hall et al, 1988 [1978]). Rhodes Boyson (cited in Hall et al, 1988 [1978]: 27) stated, the welfare state was destroying “personal liberty, individual responsibility and moral growth” and “sapping the collective moral fibre of our people as a nation”.

“The image of the overtaxed individual, enervated by welfare coddling, his initiative sapped by hand-outs of the state-Thatcherism...found a powerful means of popularising the principles of a Monetarist philosophy and in the image of the welfare ‘scavenger’ a well-designed folk devil” (Hall, 1979: 17).

This was propaganda for a reduced welfare state framed in a way that political elites had not dared to attempt in public for many years (ibid). “A sustained assault on ‘welfare scroungers’ began” (Hall et al, 1988 [1978]: 27). “Ideals of ‘universality’”, collectivism and “‘caring’...were increasingly devalued” (Leys, 1989: 125). Keith Joseph (cited in Hall et al, 1988 [1978]: 26) praised naturalised “selfishness”, “self-interest”, and “egoism”. Wealth became “admirable and enviable” (Wilks, 2013: 69).

“There [wa]s an open, frontal attack on the whole idea of equality, a shameless advocacy of elitism” (Hall et al, 1988 [1978]: 26). “The ‘winners’– the employed, in general, and the higher-paid, including skilled manual workers, in particular – began to endorse the philosophy of individualism” (ibid: 107).

In the 1980s Thatcher orchestrated two waves of privatisation of public assets and services (Leys, 1989). Privatisation boosted the Treasury budgets but assets were undersold to incentivise buyers (Harvey, 2005). The first wave involved the sale of council houses to the public and utilities to corporations (ibid). The subsidised selling of council houses incorporated working class families into the Thatcher project (ibid). It allowed Thatcher “to create a new property-owning segment of the working-class electorate, while simultaneously weakening one of the bastions of traditional Labour support, the council housing estate” (Leys, 1989: 113).

Middle class support was elicited through promotion of entrepreneurship, self-reliance, self-employment, shareholding, and property ownership (Hall, 2011). “Between 1979 and 1987 the proportion of the population owning shares increased from 7% to 20%” (ibid) and home ownership rose from 52 percent to 66 percent (Leys, 1989). Britain was purportedly becoming a ‘property owning democracy’, a classless society where all could share the benefits of the free market (Clarke, 2010a). Crucially, these developments greatly increased the number of people with mortgages (Hodkinson and Lawrence, 2011) and tied large amounts of people to an economy reliant on asset price inflation (see Stiglitz, 2012).

A second wave of privatisation saw ‘compulsive competitive tendering’ introduced in local government (Leys, 1989). The public sector was to compete with the private for contracts (ibid), which largely resulted in multi-national corporations securing contracts (Huws, 2011). It was claimed that ‘competition’ would provide greater efficiency (Peck and Tickell, 2007) ensuring ‘value for money’ for an “overstretched government” state thus allowing tax cuts (Mannin, 2010: 229). Also, the private sector would not be hampered by trade union power (Huws, 2011). The neoliberal discourse of free choice was used to legitimise privatisation (Hall, 1988b). Rather than being ‘forced’ to deal with the inefficient state service consumers could choose (Leys, 1989). However, resistance limited the extent of privatisation. The post WW2 view that

services for basic human needs should be free and collective remained strong (ibid). In 1982 when the possibility of privatising parts of the health service arose, Thatcher was forced to declare that it would remain a national asset (ibid). However, by 1988 privatisation of aspects of the NHS started to be *publicly* considered and it became touchable (ibid: 125). Privatisation and tax revenues from the windfall of oil and gas were used to fund tax cuts in 1985 (ibid).

“Neoliberalism’s loudest message is that there is no alternative” (McChesney, 1999: 15). “Thatcherism however morally uncomfortable and economically problematic...gradually became the reality, to be improved upon if possible, but otherwise to be lived with” (Leys, 1989: 117). Whilst neoliberalism was not loved it had “no serious rival” and therefore remained hegemonic (Leys, 1990: 127). Thatcherism left “the left in disarray, the defences of the labour movement weakened...and the overall balance of political forces tilted much more favourably towards a hegemony for the right” (Hall and Jacques, 1983: 13).

New Labour

In 1994 the Labour party renamed itself New Labour to reflect its claim of ‘modernisation’ (Fairclough, 2010: vii). In May 1997, after 18 years of Conservative government, New Labour was elected. “The party had never secured so many votes or won so many seats” (Driver and Martell, 2006: 1). It claimed to provide a ‘third way’ of politics transcending the left and right, interventionism and laissez faire divisions (Fairclough, 2010). The party purported an ability to blend seemingly incompatible aspects, for example, stronger public services but limited public spending predicated upon ‘reform’ via managerialism (ibid). Its change was symbolised by removing clause IV²⁹ from its constitution (Wilks, 2013). The party’s previous core values of redistribution and social protection to mitigate inequality and poverty were to a large extent superseded with neoliberal values and discourses (Fairclough, 2000). New Labour presented a “variant” of British Thatcherite neoliberalism (Hall, 2011: 714; Peck and Tickell, 2007: 44). It accepted the presentation of globalisation as inevitable

²⁹ Clause IV stated: “to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service” (New Labour cited in White, 1994).

and advocating business friendly reform to ensure Britain's competitiveness and therefore public prosperity (Fairclough, 2010: 26). The party named itself 'the party of business' (ibid) and prioritised strong relationships with corporations (Wilks, 2013). Blair (cited in Wilks, 2013: 71) stated:

“if thirty chief executives, employing thousands of people in companies worth billions of pounds says its Labour that will put the economy at risk, who does the voter believe? Answer: the chief executive. Once you lose them, you lose more than a few votes. You lose your economic credibility”.

New Labour gave greater freedom to corporations and signalled withdrawal from some functions of economic management. Specifically, the Bank of England was given the power to control interest rates (Tombs and Hillyard, 2004). The party established the Financial Services Authority, which provided light touch regulation to encourage 'innovation' and 'competition' (Froud et al, 2010a). Chancellor Brown cut corporation tax (Fairclough, 2000) and Labour distanced itself from trade unions and became more closely aligned with the City (Moody, 1997). Cost-benefit analysis of regulation was informed by “structural biases towards less regulation rather than more”, and concerned itself with financial, rather than social, costs (Tombs and Whyte, 2010: 50). “Market-based regulation” “in effect...meant a shift further toward self-regulation and wholesale regulatory disengagement” (ibid: 50, 61).

The newly branded party extended outsourcing, privatisation, and marketisation principles into the public sector³⁰. It “opened one door after another through which private capital could slip into the public sector and hollow it out from within” and create UK Plc.” (Hall, 2011: 714, 716). ‘Public-private partnerships’ became a means for the private sector to extract public money (Stiglitz, 2012). Private Finance Initiatives allowed for hospitals and schools to be built funded and owned by private corporations that then leased them back to the state for repayments of “six times the capital value” (Mair and Jones: 2015: 126). In 2008 UK public private contracts were worth €61billion whereas the *collective* cost of Europe's equivalent contracts was

³⁰ As neoliberalism “seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey, 2005: 3), public services that have not yet been privatised became operated in accordance with ‘market’ principles (Crouch, 2011). “The habits and assumptions of the private sector became embedded in the state” (Hall, 2011: 715).

€37billion (Wilks, 2013). Outsourcing of public services constituted almost 6 percent of UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and had a turnover of £79million, which was an increase of 126 percent from 1996 (Huws, 2011). Peter Mandelson (cited in Eaton, 2014) in 1998, the year he was promoted from a Minister to Secretary of State, was “intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they [paid]...their taxes”, and New Labour were to wait thirteen years before raising – in a moment of crisis – the top rate of tax. “Regressive redistribution of wealth, income and life chances [were consolidated] for most groups of people”³¹ (Tombs and Hillyard, 2004: 30). New Labour’s shift further narrowed the “voices contesting neoliberalism” (Berry, 2015: 5).

New Labour spent more on public services and *modestly* redistributed wealth (Driver and Martell, 2006). However, it was critiqued for “governing by media spin” led by the ‘spin-doctors’ Peter Mandelson and Alistair Campbell (Fairclough, 2000: vii). The party intensely managed language to sell their ideas (ibid). Extraordinarily, for a ‘progressive’ ‘labour party’ it aimed to remove notions of class and class inequality from political discourse and public minds. Following his election Blair (cited in Tyler, 2013: 153) claimed, “the class war is over” and “Britain is a meritocracy”. This was, and remains completely untrue: “class distinctions do not die; they merely learn new ways of expressing themselves” (Hoggart, 1989: viii). Thus, New Labour incorporated many discursive elements of Thatcherism. The ‘third way’ claimed to blend ‘economic dynamism’, ‘social justice’, and ‘fairness’ (Peck and Tickell, 2007). ‘Enterprise’, ‘fairness’, ‘patriotism’, ‘responsibility’ were taken from the right and ‘rights’, ‘social justice’, ‘internationalism’, and ‘attacking poverty’ were taken from the left (ibid). However, the meanings of left wing terms were hollowed out. Internationalism no longer meant “international labour movement solidarity” but “international cooperation between states”, social justice no longer entailed equality rather it meant “‘fairness and ‘inclusion’” (ibid: 45-46). ‘Community’ no longer meant collectivism (Fairclough, 2000). Rather, it was used alongside ‘duty’ and ‘obligation’ to responsabilise individuals and de-responsible the state (Hancock et al, 2012).

“The Blair and Brown governments...commenced to mobilise around a desperately populist, highly punitive (for the powerless)

³¹ Whilst New Labour undertook some progressive changes, including the minimum wage, the wealth gap between those at the top and the bottom severely increased.

law and order and social welfare strategy which was no less toxic in its implications than policies pursued under the previous Thatcher/Major regimes” (Coleman et al, 2009: 7).

Blair shared Thatcher’s heavily moralised approach. They both spoke of a “strong moral sense”, ‘the right thing’, and making “tough” but moral decisions (Hall, 2011: 716, 717). New Labour claimed that a section of social actors, notably the ‘anti-social’, were detached “from the moral order of society” and this was “corrosive” both for the individual and social moralities (Fairclough, 2000: 51, 52). The folk devils were living in local authority housing estates; they were educational failures, the homeless, the unemployed, and broken families (ibid). Estates were portrayed as areas of crime, deprivation, moral decay, and worklessness (ibid). The concept of ‘Anti-Social Behaviour’ was created to encapsulate the ‘immoral’ and undesirable behaviour of ‘the poor’ (ibid). The ‘chav’, allegedly an acronym for Council Housed and Violent, symbolised the morally deprived ‘underclass’ (ibid).

Avoiding discussion of structural conditions, social exclusion was constructed as a condition individuals got themselves in (Fairclough, 2000). The ‘big state’ and its ‘burdensome’ welfare state were taking away personal responsibility and encouraging a culture of dependency (ibid). They *chose* not to work (ibid). Echoing Thatcher, New Labour asserted that ‘something for nothing’ days were over (ibid). Welfare ‘reform’ was necessary to incentivise work and savings (Fairclough, 2010).

Blair and Brown claimed the welfare state desperately needed ‘modernising’ (Wiggan, 2012). For New Labour social justice and inclusion meant designing policies to address “moral underclass” deficiencies (Fairclough, 2000: 57). New Labour (cited in Fairclough, 2010: 187) spoke of the need for benefit claimants to understand that their rights were attached to responsibilities, individuals had to work if the state provided the opportunity to, and had to improve their ‘employability’. The concept of ‘welfare to work’ led “neoliberalisation of welfare” (Slater, 2012: 956). Welfare became a contract between government and the claimant (Fairclough, 2010), a part of a “something for something society” (Fairclough, 2000: 39).

New Labour engaged in authoritarian “moralistically driven legalistic zeal” (Hall, 2011: 714). For example, a 2003 White Paper titled *Respect and Responsibility* proposed welfare cuts for immoral families, moving young offenders to foster homes,

and re-training parents (Tyler, 2013). Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and Parental Orders were created (ibid). Between 1997 and 2008 the government legislated for 3605 new criminal offences, “almost one for everyday...in office” (Morris, 2008).

Hubristic Claims and Political ‘Opposition’ Alignment

Following the millennium neoliberals and their political representatives in New Labour made hubristic claims of the end of ‘boom’ and ‘bust’ (Fairclough, 2010). Lucas (2003: 1), a Nobel Prize winning economist, claimed the “central problem of depression prevention has been solved”. In 2002 Alan Greenspan, former Chairman of the Federal Reserve, received an honorary knighthood for securing economic stability (Gamble, 2009). In 2006 Chancellor Brown claimed that his two rules of the Code of Fiscal Stability³² had broken the “stop-go” pattern and secured long-term growth (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 118). There was an “almost unquestioning faith in efficient market theory” (Lastra and Wood, 2010: 534). Evidence to the contrary was “neglected”, “forgotten”, and excluded in favour of a “utopian interpretation” of the promises of neoliberalism (ibid: 544). This wilful ignorance would have devastating consequences.

New Labour’s adoption of a selection of Conservative policies and discourses combined with ‘modernised’ elements of traditional Labour policy allowed the party to harness greater electoral support than Thatcher. Consequently, it was now Conservatives who had to undertake the task of repositioning themselves (Fairclough, 2000). In 2005 David Cameron was elected as Conservative party leader. He portrayed himself as a politician of the middle ground and the heir to Blair (Driver and Martell, 2006). He spoke of economic success being a means for social justice, tackling poverty, and protecting the NHS (ibid). Such was the extent of the rightward shift embodied in New Labour however, that not much repositioning was required by Cameron to stake a claim to ‘the centre’. Both ‘New Labour’ and ‘Compassionate Conservatism’ accepted the fundamentals of neoliberalism. “The only thing new about New Labour was its acquiescence in neoliberalism; even in this sense, it was not new but a derivative of Thatcherism” (Jacques, 2017).

³² Brown’s two rules were government would only borrow for investment and “public sector debt will be held at sustainable and prudent levels” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 118). Until 2008 all PBRs and budget reports (BR) stated that they had been adhered to (ibid).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored neoliberalism and key moments in its ascendancy in Britain. Whatever the claims of neoliberal theory, neoliberal reality in Britain is oligopolistic markets, an over-powerful financial sector, and increasing inequality. The capitalist crisis facilitated neoliberals' implementation of their desired conditions but they had to work to gradually erode aspects of social democratic capitalism. Neoliberals constructed and disseminated their theory, exploited crisis, and neoliberalism captured (New) Labour, not only Conservatism. The following chapter explains how the neoliberal conditions implemented by governments since 1979 led to crisis and discusses neoliberals' exploitation of the crisis to accelerate implementation of their desired changes.

Chapter Three

The Neoliberal Crisis and a Review of Existing Literature on its Narration

Introduction

This chapter seeks to capture the neoliberal crisis from 2007 to 2015 and locate this research within the existing literature. Neoliberal elites seizing of the *neoliberal* crisis to intensify the *neoliberal project* is explored. The injustices, and seeming irrationality, of the 'resolution' are given focus. The second part of the chapter reviews existing literature, highlighting lacunae to explicate the original contributions of this thesis.

The Conditions Preceding the 2007-8 Financial Crisis

The 'resolving' of the 1970s social democratic capitalist crisis with the onset of a neoliberal project led to the 2007-8 financial crisis. Deepening wealth inequality had

disastrous consequences for capitalism's functioning. The wealthy lacked outlets for investment; there was a "capital surplus disposal problem" (Harvey, 2012). Manufacturing was no longer a productive site of investment therefore new markets were needed (ibid). At the same time, working class wage repression, caused by offshoring of skilled work, consequent deindustrialisation, and unemployment, meant others lacked the income required to ensure demand. Moreover, simultaneously lower taxes on wealth meant that the state too saw income falling below what was required for spending. These developments had potentially detrimental consequences for growth. The financial sector stepped in to manage the imbalance. Deregulated finance ensured credit flows to maintain consumption (Crouch, 2011; Panitch and Gindin, 2010; Shannon, 2014a). The financial system expanded enormously and many became reliant upon credit (Saad-Filho, 2010), to engage in "debt financed consumerism" (Harvey, 2005: 190). A "narcissistic" "consumer culture" was generated to encourage demand (ibid: 41, 62). Household credit became normalised (Radice, 2010). Through the financialisation of households, workers reliant on credit stimulated the economy. Government too sought to fund projects through costly ways, including 'Private Finance Initiatives'. Capital surplus came to be recycled less through tax and more through lending. In Streeck's (2017b) terminology, the tax state became the debt state.

Eventually the financial industry reached a barrier. Financial institutions were limited by the need to possess the capital required to support their loan books (Lapavistas, 2009). To continue their expansion they needed to release further capital (ibid). The doctrine of deregulation installed by Thatcher and maintained by her successors freed financiers to develop risky and toxic, complex and non-transparent financial products, which allowed them to securitise the risk of default and free institutions from their credit restrictions – they could now lend without the supporting capital (see Gamble, 2009).

"One of the causes of the crisis was not just risk-taking behaviour on the part of these institutions, but the nature and level of regulation at both national state and international levels which either allowed or encourages such activities – in other words, the crisis represented not just forms of corporate crime and harm, but of state complicity in these" (Tombs, 2016a: 75).

Financial elites innovated to create products that allowed them to circumvent the limits placed on the capital accumulation process (Harvey, 2011). The “exotic” (Chomsky cited in Shannon, 2014b: 48) financial instruments provided a new market of investment where the commodity was debt. The wealthy speculated in financial assets and leveraged to produce returns on their investment (Harvey, 2012).

A key product or derivative³³ was the mortgage-backed collateralised debt obligation (CDO). Thousands of mortgages with different risk levels were bundled together to form a mortgage-backed security, up to one hundred and fifty of these were packaged together to form a CDO (Crotty, 2009). CDOs were then sold on to investors. Credit default swaps allowed investors to pay a premium to an insurance company in exchange for protection if the debtor defaulted (ibid). The products were ‘insurance obligations...swapped (in fact, bartered) between operators in order to protect themselves against the risks of investment’ (Marazzi, 2011: 35). Banks increased their leveraging ratio to provide greater profits, but by doing so also created greater potential losses (Harvey, 2011).

Traders in commercial and investment banks, insurance companies, hedge funds, and private equity funds had perverse incentives, which encouraged them to engage in excess (Crotty, 2009; Crouch, 2011). Bankers received a fee for each mortgage they sold, investment bankers received a fee for each sale of CDOs, and the insurance companies that insured the investments received premiums (Crotty, 2009). The CDOs were quickly sold over and over again because the greater the velocity the higher traders’ bonuses (Chomsky in Shannon, 2014b). Trader remuneration was granted even if the transaction did not add value to the account (Harvey, 2005). Also if a security produced losses bankers did not have to repay their fee, which meant there was no personal financial risk (Crotty, 2009). Entrepreneurial financiers and corporations that engaged in financial securitisation accumulated large amounts of

³³ Derivatives are contracts based on assets, which have varying levels of risk that are measured, priced, and sold (Bryan and Rafferty, 2010). The price of a derivative varies depending on underlying assets, such as stocks, market indexes, interest rates, exchange rates, oil prices, credit default risk, and house prices (ibid).

wealth (Harvey, 2005). There were ‘astronomic executive salaries and bonuses’³⁴ (Hall, 2011: 717). “In the phase of overtrading...activity becomes frenetic, the aspirations of individuals do not cease to grow, the velocity of transactions is accelerated, and the prices of real or virtual financial assets...are inflamed” (Aglietta cited in Marazzi, 2011: 26-27). This led to “extraordinary” levels of leveraging, “which reached a historical maximum in June 2007” (Lastra and Wood, 2010: 542).

Wall Street and the City of London led trading of the products (Harvey, 2011). Risk was commoditised across a global market³⁵ (ibid). Securitisation of mortgages allowed risks to be sold on and loans to be kept off balance sheets, which allowed financial institutions to expand their credit services (Lapavitsas, 2009). The absence of restrictions on supporting capital and personal incentives gave bankers the freedom and the motive to loan other people’s money to those who could not afford to repay it (Kay, 2015). Financial innovation and deregulation facilitated subprime and predatory lending (Shannon, 2014a). Subprime lending is when credit is given to those who have poor credit ratings and would not be eligible for a standard loan (Gamble, 2009). The loans tend to have higher interest rates (ibid). Predatory lending refers to when institutions sell mortgages (using both legal and illegal practices, Glasberg et al, 2014) to some of the poorest knowing that they do not have the incomes to support the debt (Lapavitsas, 2009). The subprime market increased from \$35billion in 1994 to \$600billion in 2006, 75 percent of which had been securitised (ibid). Consumers were aggressively targeted for re-mortgaging, which included the transfer of other debts to their mortgage (Glasberg et al, 2014). It did not matter to the banks that the debtor could not afford the mortgage because they could securitise the loan allowing sellers to receive their fee and the bank a profit (Chomsky in Shannon, 2014b; Glasberg et al, 2014). Ethnic minorities and women, for whom credit had historically been harder to obtain, became targets of lenders (Dymski et al, 2013). In the US African Americans

³⁴ Between 2004 and 2008 Fred Goodwin, who was the CEO of the Royal Bank of Scotland Group, received £15million (The Guardian, 2009). Over the nine years prior to the financial crisis ten Wall Street bankers had incomes of over \$1.7billion (ibid).

³⁵ As many investors came from overseas when US interest rates inevitably rose the consequences would be (and were) global (Harvey, 2005). A Norwegian council invested its funds for public services in the mortgage industry (Aalbers, 2009). Consequentially, when the crisis hit schools were closed, nursing home budgets cut and the fire department, in a town where most houses were made from wood, became a daytime only service (ibid).

were particularly targeted (Aalbers, 2009). These conditions led to the property credit bubble from 2001 to 2007 (Lapavistas, 2009; Wilks, 2013).

In ten years UK house prices doubled (Gamble, 2009). Price rises meant people were able to re-mortgage and release equity (Panitch and Gindin, 2010). Many became reliant on “inflation of asset value” for consumption; their homes became “ATM machines” (Harvey, 2011: 26). Equity from house price inflation became the collateral for further borrowing. Asset inflation created an effect of wealth, particularly for those bought and sold many houses explicitly to generate profit (Radice, 2010). The financial industry helped to cultivate the perception that the wealth of the boom was ‘trickling down’, which Blyth (2010) terms “the illusion of prosperity”. Credit helped to obscure wealth inequalities (Blyth, 2013a). However, ‘homeowners’ became owners of bigger and bigger potentially unaffordable mortgages (Bowman, 2014). For governments wealth creation and growth were a result of free market led capitalism, but the neoliberal boom period was fuelled and sustained by debt (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Soederberg, 2010).

There was no independent (Gamble, 2009) or centralised pricing system for financial products (Engelen et al, 2012). Securities were priced based on estimates of unknown risk and return (ibid). Rating agencies and corporate accounting systems started using abstract stock market values (Chomsky in Shannon, 2014b) legitimised by efficient market hypothesis. Finance capital was working on “fantasies” (Clarke, 2010a: 339). Some bankers referred to the process of pricing a CDO as “magic” (Crotty, 2009: 567). This caused “speculative bubbles...in which 90-95 percent of all money [was]...actually speculative with no connection to production or trade” (Graeber cited in Stern-Weiner, 2011). Efficient market theory would turnout to be a “fairy-tale” (Crotty, 2009: 564). Warren Buffet’s description of derivatives as “time bombs” and “financial weapons of mass destruction” would prove to be accurate (Bryan and Rafferty, 2010).

“What came to light after 2008 beat everything [previous financial corruption]: rating agencies being paid by the producers of toxic securities to award them top grades; offshore shadow banking, money laundering and assistance in large scale tax evasion as the normal business of the biggest banks...the sale to unsuspecting customers of securities constructed so that other customers could bet

against them; the leading banks worldwide fraudulently fixing interest rates and the gold price, and so on” (Streeck, 2014: 61-62).

Deregulation of finance allowed “speculation, predation, fraud, and thievery” (Harvey, 2005: 161) and the financial industry to become toxic, oversized and particularly vulnerable to crisis (Saad-Filho, 2010). It was highly volatile and fragile (Shaikh, 2010). Financialised capitalism had built an “enormous superstructure of debt” (Lapavitsas, 2009: 138). The financial system was “a bricolage of long, fragile chains” linked across global institutions (Froud et al, 2010a: 99). Deindustrialisation, unemployment, offshoring, inequality, privatisation, globalisation, entrepreneurialism, ‘innovation’, greed, and deregulation collectively formed the foundations of the neoliberal capitalist crisis.

Neoliberal Crisis, Opportunity, and Responses

In 2008 the financial system brought the economy “to the edge of the abyss” (Crotty, 2009: 575). Financialisation, globalisation and deregulation, proclaimed over previous decades as the paths to security and success, culminated in a financial crisis (Crotty, 2009; Lapavitsas, 2009; Saad-Filho, 2010). Financialised capitalism met its limit (Harvey, 2011).

Many U.S subprime and predatory mortgages were tracker mortgages (Glasberg et al, 2014). When the Federal Reserve, in response to rising inflation, raised interest rates many debtors defaulted on their payments³⁶ (ibid). Hundreds of thousands of mortgagees were left in arrears and repossessions significantly increased³⁷. As financial risk had been securitised globally through casino style³⁸ banking (Montgomerie, 2008; Saad-Filho, 2010), there was a “domino effect” across financial systems (Shannon, 2014a: 4) or as Garland (2014: 280) states, an international “chain reaction”. Stuckler and Basu (2013) describe the financial crisis as spreading like a

³⁶ Harvey (2011) notes that in 2006 there were significant increases in mortgage defaults in the US amongst African Americans and single parent families in low-income areas. When defaults significantly increased across the white middle class population political and media concern heightened (ibid).

³⁷ In the UK the number of households in more than three months of arrears peaked in 2009 at 280,900 and the number of home repossessions was 48,900 (Shelter, 2016b).

³⁸ Strange (1997) proposed the concept ‘casino capitalism’ to refer to the gambles and risks taken in unregulated global capitalism.

virus from its origins in the US mortgage system across the Atlantic to the UK and European markets. By autumn 2008 a US housing market crisis became a liquidity crisis for the UK financial industry (Albo and Evans, 2010).

Financial products quickly became unsellable (Lapavistas, 2009), and consequently financial institutions suddenly held significant losses³⁹ (Crotty, 2009; Shaikh, 2010) and leading banks faced bankruptcy⁴⁰ (Shannon, 2014a). When the US government left Lehman Brothers to fail the shock through the global financial system led financial institutions to stop lending to, and investing in, one another (Paul, 2014). Insurance corporations, such as AIG, which had supposedly insured against risk of defaults, were undercapitalised for the scale of losses (Crotty, 2009; Harvey, 2011). Banks and insurers were in “a financial crisis of indebtedness” (Harvey, 2005: 178). Saad-Filho (2010: 249) describes capitalism as “bleed(ing) uncontrollably” for a number of weeks, with daily announcements of unprecedented losses and banks on the brink of collapse. The “depth and complexities grew faster than economic and political leaders could grasp” (Jessop, 2013: 245).

The illiquid financial system approached collapse (Froud et al, 2010a; Saad-Filho, 2010) and became a “political emergency” (Gamble, 2009: 39). It shifted from low to high politics (Froud et al, 2010a) becoming a primary concern of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the House of Commons⁴¹ (Froud et al, 2010a), and the public. Contrary to the prescriptions of market fundamentalists⁴², political elites

³⁹ To illustrate the fall in value of financial products, Bear Stearns, a US-based global investment bank that traded in exotic financial products, was valued at \$18 billion in 2007 but was sold to Morgan Chase, a US financial services corporation, for \$240 million in 2008 (Gamble, 2009). “Within one minute, literally, one of the most important investment banks on Wall Street was compelled to sell itself to JP Morgan Chase at defeating prices, \$2 per share, when only 48 hours before it cost \$30” (Marazzi, 2011: 9).

⁴¹ Between 1997 and 2007 only one meeting of the Tripartite Standing Committee, which coordinated the Bank of England, the Financial Services Authority, and the HM Treasury and was nominally chaired by political elites, was actually attended by political elites (Froud et al, 2010b).

⁴² Market fundamentalists blamed the crisis on too much government intervention and central bank power to manipulate inflation and argued that political elites should not intervene and the financial industry should not be bailed out (Gamble, 2009; Thompson, 2009). Rather it should be left to fail and follow its ‘natural’ path (Gamble, 2009; Thompson, 2009). Gamble (2009) notes that this view was not one widely taken by elites in the UK when the financial industry was in crisis, but notably there was more support for minimal state intervention after the financial industry had been saved.

urgently became “managers of the financial system”, in partnership with financial elites (Froud et al, 2012: 47). Paradoxically, financial elites actually deepened their permeation of politics with “the very highest reaches of the core executive” being opened up “in the form of both ministerial appointments and in the shaping of institutions like UKFI” (Froud et al, 2010b: 30). There was a trans-boundary relationship⁴³. HM Treasury, for example, paid Credit Suisse £107 million of public money for advice on how political elites should respond to the financial industry (see Grice, 2009). As finance became central to political debate elites had to disseminate texts about the financial industry for public consumption (Froud et al, 2012). Moreover, some financial elites, for example the Governor of the Bank of England, shifted from technocratic positions to the position of key public figure (Pritchard, 2009). Whilst political elites dominated narration, financial elites played a key role (Berry, 2015).

Saving the Banks, Finance Capital, and Neoliberalism

“In order to save neoliberalism from itself” (Saad-Filho, 2010: 242), political elites nationalised financial institutions⁴⁴, brokered mergers and takeovers, provided loans and guarantees of deposits, undertook quantitative easing (QE) to inject liquidity into the system, and the Bank of England reduced interest rates (Brassett and Vaughan-Williams, 2012; Froud et al, 2012; Saad-Filho, 2010). Lloyds TSB took over Halifax and the Bank of Scotland (HBOS), which was partially the result of the Prime Minister’s negotiations at a social event where he promised the Lloyds’ Chairman the bank’s exemption from competition regulation (Froud et al, 2010b). Consequently the merged entity held a third of the UK saving and mortgage industry (Goddard et al, 2009). Breaching the touchstone neoliberal theory principle of competition, banks ‘too big to fail’ became even bigger. Political elites extracted public money and gifted it to a few private institutions. In cash terms by March 2011 the UK government had spent

⁴³ Paul Myner, a former chairman of Guardian media group and Marks and Spencer’s, became a member of the House of Lords in 2008 and was the Financial Services Secretary between 2008 and 2010.

⁴⁴ Northern Rock was nationalised in February 2008 and RBS, HBOS and Bradford and Bingley were partially nationalised between April and August 2008 (Pritchard, 2009). By July 2009 UKFI held 70 per cent of the share capital of RBS and 43 per cent of Lloyds banking groups share capital, or as the UKFI framed it each UK household possessed £3000 worth of shares in RBS and Lloyds (Froud et al, 2012).

£123.93billion⁴⁵ on purchasing shares in banks and providing them with loans (National Audit Office, 2011). The cost of the UK bailout is widely claimed to be £850billion⁴⁶ (Grice, 2009). However, the overall monetary cost for the public is unknown, and will largely be determined by the amount received when nationalised banks are fully re-privatised, although sales so far suggest major losses. According to the Bank of England (cited in Froud et al, 2012: 35) the bailout was “the largest UK government intervention in financial markets since the outbreak of the First World War”.

Some analyses have suggested that between October 2008 and June 2009 there was a temporary but dramatic return to a Keynesian state intervention to provide liquidity and stimulate growth, and a temporary abandonment of neoliberal economics (see Blyth, 2013b; Froud et al, 2010b; Saad-Filho, 2010). Froud et al (2010b: 30) write of “New Labour, the Treasury and the Bank of England” tearing up “their neo-liberal scripts”. Whilst the central bank cut interest rates⁴⁷, engaged in QE, bought government bonds, this was coupled with tight fiscal policy and the cutting of public spending, a move more closely associated with neoliberal theory. Whilst monetary policy was more closely associated with Keynes and the bailout breached neoliberal theory’s tenet of non-intervention, the approach was used *to save the financial system*. The central bank did not inject money into infrastructure to create adequately paid employment (Shaikh, 2010), in the style of ‘People’s QE’ (see Murphy, 2015). Neoliberalism allowed banks to produce inconceivable wealth for the few at the expense of the many. Then, the state used public money to bail out banks and then sought to address this by engaging in a period of austerity harming the many, particularly the vulnerable. Arguably the monetary and fiscal response is *the epitome of the real neoliberal project*. The government “guarantee[d] the...solvency of financial institutions at no matter what cost”, even “the wellbeing of the population” (Harvey, 2005: 73, 71). The financial crisis certainly proved that real existing

⁴⁵ The government gave the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) £45.80billion, Lloyds £20.54billion, Northern Rock £22.99billion, and Bradford and Bingley £8.55billion and £26.05billion for loans to support deposits (National Audit Office, 2011). In fees and interests the government received £2.64billion in the financial year of 2010-2011 (ibid).

⁴⁶ For a clear breakdown of costs see Grice (2009).

⁴⁷ In October 2008, the month of the bailout, the Bank of England cut the interest rate from 5% to 4.5% and by March 2009 it was 0.5% (Bank of England, 2016).

neoliberalism requires a powerful state prioritising the finance industry's interests (Chomsky, 2010). It also shows that where theoretical principles conflict with dominant interests they "are either abandoned or become so twisted as to be unrecognisable" (Harvey, 2005: 19).

As a result of the state bailout the financial system was, at least in the short term, stabilised (Armaline and DeLeon, 2014; Love and Mattern, 2011). However, many of the public who were victims of the actions of the financial system were not fortunate enough to be rescued by the state and became 'bad' financial subjects whose poor credit rating placed them in chronic crisis given the centrality of credit to affording living costs. They may, for example, be ineligible for a mortgage, certainly an affordable one, or not pass landlord checks necessary for private rental leaving them reliant on depleted social housing.

The financial industry's critical condition and dependence upon the state for rescue, coupled with popular hostility towards banks, provided the opportunity to subject it to reform (Stiglitz, 2012; Froud et al, 2010a, b). Neoliberalism was overtly discredited (Froud et al, 2010a). Bailouts could have been granted on the conditions of an end to long chains of debt, the introduction of a tax on each financial transaction, interest free loans for students, or contributions to infrastructure development to name a few. However, no conditions were attached to the "massive transfer of wealth" from the public to private finance (Stiglitz, 2012: 210). "The political elite bailed out the financial elite without imposing any conditions and without any plan of what to do next" (Froud et al, 2010b: 30). "Never in the history of the planet had so many given so much to so few who were so rich without asking anything in return" (Stiglitz, 2012: 210). The state's un-conditionality when protecting the banks stands in stark contrast to the intensification in the conditionality of welfare (see Wiggan, 2011). Those whose actions inflicted mass harm were given an unconditional safety net whilst support for those at the bottom of the class hierarchy became evermore conditional, exemplifying the injustice of crisis responses.

Whilst Iceland tried and imprisoned senior executives of banks for their roles in the crisis (see Birrell, 2015) and tried its Prime Minister (see Neate, 2012), political and financial elites in Britain were not subjected to a criminal justice response for their

role in the financial crisis⁴⁸. Whilst Armaline and DeLeon (2013: 428) state that bankers committed “reckless criminal fraud”, Chomsky (2010) refutes suggestions that the actions of financial elites were irrational and taken with disregard of the consequences. Rather, financial elites undertook actions that benefitted them personally and, for a long time, seemingly their corporations⁴⁹ (Chomsky, 2010; Hargie et al, 2010). Traders undertook “win-win gambles” (Crotty, 2009: 570). Arguably financial elites recognised their power and knew the state would operate in their interests (Chomsky, 2010; Wolf, 2008). “The belief that some institutions were too-big-to-fail...triggered moral hazard” (Lastra and Wood, 2010: 539). The 2008 confirmation of the state’s commitment to banks demonstrated, consolidated, and enhanced the power of the financial industry (Harvey, 2009, 2011; Henwood, 2010). Furthermore, the state’s failure to reform the financial industry in its responses to crisis (Tombs, 2016a) reinforces the perception of too-big-to-fail.

The financial industry has a talent for ensuring, with the support of the government, that gains are privatised and losses and failings are socialised (see Engelen et al, 2012; Harvey, 2011; Wolf, 2008). This supports Beck’s (1992: 19, 35) theorisation that “the social production of *wealth* is systematically accompanied by the social production of *risks*” but that wealth and risks are not equally distributed rather “wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom”. “Privatisation of profit and the socialisation of risk” are endemic to capitalism (Tombs, 2016a: 69). Lastra and Wood (2010: 531) argue that “the fear of failure” and the threat of “management, shareholders, bondholders, and all creditors (except small depositors)” being the ones who “suffer in a failure” needs to implemented through major reforms.

⁴⁸ In the UK three bankers were imprisoned for rigging the Libor rate (see Bowers, 2016) and a HBOS manager and five of his colleagues were imprisoned for inflicting a loan scam on some small businesses (see Neate, 2017). However, unlike in Iceland, there have not been criminal prosecutions of bankers and politicians for their role in the crisis. As Streeck (2014: 62) states, fines paid by banks have been “minuscule when compared to the banks’ balance sheets - not to mention the fact that all of these were out-of-court settlements of cases that governments didn’t want or dare to prosecute”.

⁴⁹ See Punch (2009) for explanations of corporate harm and why workers commit harm in corporations. Lastra and Wood (2010: 543) suggest “excessive ‘group think’ and ‘herd behaviour’” were a cause of the crisis. Also see Tett (2009) for a discussion of the cause of ‘group think’.

In 2008-2009 the financial crisis spread into the real economy (Broome et al, 2012). Banks tightened their lending to businesses and the public (Love and Mattern, 2011). QE and cutting interest rates and taxes (rather than ending a low wage economy) sought to encourage more household borrowing and consumption. For QE to be effective banks must not hold onto the money rather it must be re-spent or invested. The injected monies:

“appear on the face of it appear largely to have been hoarded by banks to prop up reserves and balance sheets – and thus profits for shareholders (Konzelmann, 2014) – rather than engaging in the stimuli which most post-crises economies desperately needed and which central banks at least claimed was their intention” (Tombs, 2016a: 187).

The government’s failure to require banks to pass on injected monies meant household and small businesses did not feel the benefit whereas the wealthy benefitted from rises in share and bond values (Allen, 2015). Unemployment and the threat of it, falling real incomes, and reduced access to finance meant consumers drew back on their non-essential spending (see Wood, 2011; Wray, 2010).

Lack of demand, in turn led to a reduction in production (Lapavitsas, 2009). This caused businesses to close or cut costs, which contributed to unemployment⁵⁰, falling real incomes, and insecurity that perpetuated the lack of demand (ibid). The contraction led to significantly reduced mortgage availability, which coupled with increased property repossessions depressed house values (Harvey, 2011). Consequently, many mortgagees were left in negative equity (Lapavitsas, 2009). One effect of early and large quantitative easing is the restoration and even the increase of property values, as shown with Japan’s comparatively large-scale QE programme.

Crouch (2015: 6) states there was a “defeat” of neoliberalism. The claim “that failure of deregulated finance was impossible” was “disproved” (ibid: 6). Given that the crisis was rooted in neoliberalism it would perhaps follow that there would be a crisis *of* neoliberalism and therefore a new form of capitalism introduced as the ‘resolution’

⁵⁰ At its peak in 2011 the unemployment rate was 8.4 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

(Crouch, 2011). Hillyard and Tombs (2004: 32) suggested that “when the first bank collapses the reality” of the senselessness of neoliberalism might become apparent. When financial crisis struck, for a moment, faith was questioned and some claimed neoliberalism had reached its end (Massey, 2012a, b). However, these were only “a few lone voices” (Watkins, 2010: 13). Remarkably, in the aftermath of the crisis and during the period of 2010-2015 there was a “strange non-death of neoliberalism” (Crouch, 2011: viii). As Hall (2011: 728) stated:

“in ambition, depth, degree of break with past, variety of sites being colonised, impact on common sense and everyday behaviour, restructuring of the social architecture, neoliberalism does constitute a *hegemonic project*”.

“Virtually everything” remained (Crouch, 2011: 179) and the neoliberal project intensified (Blyth, 2013b; Jessop, 2013; Peck et al, 2013). Peck et al (2013: 1091) refer to neoliberalism as having a “Houdini-like ability” to not only survive crises but gain momentum from them. The ‘resolution’ was *more* of what caused it.

Neoliberal elites’ choice of responses “constitute[d] a neoliberal shock doctrine” (Levitas, 2012: 320). They seized the opportunity to intensify neoliberal conditions in ways that had long been desired but difficult to publicly justify (Huws, 2011: 64). “The financial crisis [was]...recreated as an opportunity for a significant power and wealth grab on the part of capital and political elites” (Tombs, 2016a: 70). Hall (2011: 718, 721) describes the financial crisis as “the alibi” the Conservative party needed to deepen neoliberalism and shift wealth and power “to the already rich and powerful”. The crisis was transferred from the financial sector and its elite to the public sector and the public (Albo and Evans, 2010; Blyth, 2013a; Curtis, 2013). The “shifting of blame and cost to the public sector, and public sector workers in particular, has been nothing less than astonishing” (Evans and Hussey, 2011: 37). Saad-Filho (2010: 244) suggests that “never in economic history has so much trouble and expense been rewarded with such effrontery”.

Austerity: An Illogical and Harmful Response

A core element of the neoliberal ‘resolution’ was austerity - fiscal consolidation by the government (Blyth, 2010). The extent of cuts has been unprecedented in a UK context (Levitas, 2012). Whilst some governments were forced by Troika to impose austerity

in exchange for national bailouts in what are termed structural adjustment programmes⁵¹, (Harvey, 2011; Žižek, 2009) in Britain the government determined austerity (Levitas, 2012). In 2010 the cost of the bailout and lower tax revenues due to recession were problems for UK finance (Gamble, 2015). The rise in public spending as a share of GDP demonstrated the change (ibid). At this point, the government had several options for responding: increase taxes on under-productive or counter-productive wealth, cut spending, and/or increase borrowing (ibid). Austerity was framed as the necessary means to address deficit and debt (ibid). Whilst the harms of austerity, as outlined in the introduction, alone should ethically discredit it, austerity has also been widely discredited as a mechanism for resolving economic crisis, even before its poor results in this crisis. “The intellectual case” is “bankrupt” (Krugman, 2015). For Blyth (2010), austerity was “nonsense” and “dangerous”. Historical and contemporary evidence proved that austerity was an illogical response (Blyth, 2013a).

Evidence shows that if the private sector and the public are deleveraging, the government should leverage up to compensate. Keynes called it “the paradox of thrift”: when the people spend less, the government has to spend more” (Hari, 2011). Whilst there may be too much public debt because of the bailout and regressive taxation, cutting public spending whilst the private sector and public are cutting back causes the economy to suffer. It contributes to a lack of demand and therefore growth, which is detrimental to levels of tax revenues and the public finances (Chu, 2016; Hari, 2011). Increased public spending can increase demand, including by encouraging investor and public confidence, and consequently growth (Krugman, 2010; Skidelsky and Kennedy, 2010). Fiscal contraction overwhelmingly results in growth contraction as opposed to expansion (see Clarke and Newman, 2012).

⁵¹ In May 2010, amid international concern over Greece’s debt given the interconnected international economy, Troika agreed a €110billion bailout in exchange for an austerity package (Wearden, 2010). In February 2012 Greece was provided with a second Troika bailout of €130billion traded for even deeper austerity (Wearden and Smith, 2012), which included public sector redundancies, holiday entitlement cuts, an increase in the pension age, reduction in pension payments, an increase in privatisation (Albo and Evans, 2010) and a reduction in its health sector funding as well as, typically of neoliberalism, a rollback of its labour rights (Stiglitz, 2012). Following the Irish government setting up a bank guarantee making the public responsible for bank debt, Ireland needed to turn to the IMF for a loan (Carney et al, 2014). Despite Ireland having a surplus budget prior to the crisis, the IMF required an austerity package in return (Stiglitz, 2012).

“When you have national debt and you try to cut it you are actually reducing demand in the economy, which then reduces the output because firms cannot sell enough and your GDP might be shrinking, at least shrinking faster than your debt is shrinking” (Chang, 2016).

Consequently, austerity can increase the debt-GDP ratio (ibid). The response of the UK economy to the Coalition’s response of austerity gave impetus to this argument. Over the parliamentary term the Coalition missed its own debt and deficit targets. Low tax revenues, caused by low business, government, and public spending were not conducive to reducing the deficit (Mason and Allen, 2014). Whilst Westminster defenders argued austerity was necessary to protect Britain’s fiscal credibility, in 2013 following a programme of severe austerity the UK’s credit rating was downgraded due to concerns about growth (BBC, 2013).

“The average growth rate from 1950 to 2010 was close to 2.25 percent. Even under the last Labour government, average growth was 1.5 percent, and that period included the global financial crisis. The past few years...should have been a time of above-average, not below-average growth...all academic macroeconomists would argue that the cuts in public investment that occurred in 2010 were a grave mistake” (Wren-Lewis, 2015).

To reduce the debt to GDP ratio, Osborne sold off UK assets including bank shares (Stewart, 2015). Whilst these boost finances in the short term they are costly in the long term because of loss of income from repayments and dividends (ibid). As the UK had the freedom to engage in quantitative easing and adjust interest rates the UK fared better than some Eurozone countries subjected to austerity (see Blyth, 2013a; Gamble, 2015). Also a large portion of UK debt is in long-term bonds whereas the debts of the Eurozone countries are mainly in short term bonds and therefore when debt is renewed interest rates are increased (Gamble, 2015). The key point for this thesis is that there were clear, logical and less harmful alternatives but Westminster parties chose austerity and continued to support it despite it making extremely difficult.

Given the irrationality of austerity the ‘resolution’ has been widely critiqued for being part of a class-based project (see Albo and Evans, 2010; Blyth, 2010). This is given further impetus by the fact that Westminster continued to commit to austerity despite its failings in this crisis. Class inequality was a key cause of the crisis (Burley, 2014),

it determined responses, and has been deepened by the intensification of neoliberal conditions (see Bourke et al, 2011; Carney et al, 2014; Shannon, 2014a; Stiglitz, 2012). Austerity has been used to rollback harm reduction systems created under social democratic capitalism, most notably the welfare state, and to further privatise the NHS.

“Balancing the books was not really what behind this austerity policy. It was an attempt to undermine the welfare state, rewrite the social contract and re-engineer the economy in the image of the...free market system” (Chang, 2016).

For Hall (2011: 718), “ideology is in the driving seat, though vigorously denied”.

Narrating the Crisis to Prevent a Crisis of Neoliberalism

Westminster held a consensus around neoliberalism and definers constructed a narrative for protecting and intensifying the project to ensure the crisis was only *in* neoliberalism and the interests of the powerful continued to be served (Curtis, 2013). Westminster definers engaged in “intensive ideological work...to find the alchemy that might turn disaster into triumph – the triumph being a new neo-liberal settlement (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 300).

“At each moment...[constructions of crisis has] required intense political-cultural labour to capture the future and to control the meanings of crisis in the midst of profoundly contradictory tendencies, forces and possibilities” (ibid: 303).

Wiggan (2012: 385) described neoliberalism as being resold to the public and Oosterlynck and González (2013: 1075) describe a ‘re-assemblage’ of demonstrably flawed pre-crisis discourses. Hegemony remained; whilst there was some evidence of active support, acquiescence dominated. As Gilbert (2013: 18) stated, there was not “a major crisis of consent of neoliberalism” as one may have expected.

Crucially, when the crisis began and for several years afterwards, in Massey’s (2012b: 75) terminology, there were “no ‘forces’ at the ready” to seize the opportunity to challenge neoliberalism. There was an:

“absence of a widely circulating and aggressively pushed alternative paradigm. While the long wave of neoliberalism has spawned a diverse array of contending social movements, these have yet to

articulate a coherent and broadly shared economic philosophy – either in the shape of a utopian counter-vision, or as a workable political compromise” (Peck, 2010: 275).

Groups such as UK Uncut and Occupy physically protested against a particular response and shared a counter-hegemonic message. But, there was not a powerful oppositional movement seeking to gain support for an alternative resolution that had legitimacy in the system and was able to engage in a discursive struggle with Westminster to widely influence sense-making at the national level. As Fraser (2013: 121), suggests social movements did not form a “unite[d]” “coherent counter-project to neoliberalism”. Supporting this analysis, Interoccupy (cited in Chomsky, 2012: 69), a group providing communication across the Occupy movement, stated that one of Occupy’s goals was “to occupy the mainstream and transition from the tents and into the hearts and minds of the masses”. Consequently, whilst Westminster definers sought to counter perceptions of major inequality and an absence of meritocracy and social justice, which Occupy’s resistance sought to highlight, they did not need to discursively counter the Occupy narrative per se. Rather, in the UK at least the coercive state apparatus has taken lead in countering Occupy (see Ball and Quinn, 2012). There was also an absence, as the primary research explores, of political parties offering real alternatives to neoliberalism.

For years, the absence of challenges both within and outside the period of crisis facilitated neoliberalism’s dominance. Neoliberal definers dominated ‘debate’ and voices of the left did not have the necessary power and platform. After the financial crisis, there was a lack of serious rivals and, an astonishing paucity of new thinking or policies (Harvey 2014: xi). Later in the neoliberal crisis this changed with challenges belatedly emerging⁵² that may have the potential to achieve major change and achieve a somewhat delayed crisis of neoliberalism. Consequently, as the primary research also explores, as the crisis progressed Westminster definers had to narrate challenges.

Positioning this Research within the Existing Literature

⁵² Elsewhere in Europe there were challenges much earlier, for example in Iceland (see Stoddard, 2009).

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to identifying existing literature in the area of elite narration of the neoliberal crisis in a British context and locating this research's position. Existing literature on Westminster narration either comparatively focuses on limited topics, themes or elite definers, uses limited data, provides a snapshot analysis of one moment, or a combination of these, and there are not comprehensive analyses of challenges of the three moments analysed in this thesis. Therefore, this thesis addresses lacunae in the existing literature in the following ways. It contributes a longitudinal analysis of Westminster narration of the crisis between 2010 and 2015. It analyses a comprehensive data set and is concerned with the comparatively broad scope of narration of crisis causes, responses and proposed responses, and challenges. It contributes analyses of narration of challenges that began to emerge over the period. It also contributes comprehensive analyses of narration in the moments of GE10, SIR14, and GE15. The existing literature does not *collectively* provide this. For a summary of the most pertinent items of literature analysing British political elite narration of the neoliberal crisis see Appendix A.

As Appendix A shows, existing research on elite narration of neoliberal crisis in a British context has overwhelmingly focused on comparatively brief moments, for example Pritchard's (2009) work. Whilst Walsh (2016) and Dorey's (2009) studies were longitudinal, the periods under analysis, the topics of focus, and the size of the corpuses are different from this research. This research project's combination of comprehensive data sets and longitudinal analysis has enabled the contribution of an analysis of which discourses emerged, became prominent and dominated and which faded and were marginalised, the gradual dissemination of ideas and arguments, the timing of definers' 'news', the shifts in the terrain of the debate, and a reflection on continuities and differences.

Whilst there is research that has conducted analyses of large data sets, for example Wiggan (2012) and Tombs (2016a), the data sets are smaller than the one for this research, and like most of the existing literature, the analysis of the data was concerned with a narrower topic, shorter time period (Wiggan) and different time period (Tombs), and the studies were not explicitly concerned with developments in the narrative over time. Other research has focussed on a couple of texts or even just one (for example Hargie et al, 2010; Mackay, 2015; Wiggan, 2012). Whilst there have been analyses

concerned with the wider notion of securing public consent (for example, Clarke and Newman, 2012) this has been limited in its time period and size of data set. This research's longitudinal analysis had a comprehensive data set that was analysed with a concern for the comparatively wider topic of crisis causes, responses, proposed responses, and challenges allowed the thesis to contribute a comprehensive analysis of Westminster narration of crisis that did not exist in the literature.

There are a number of key moments where narration of crisis has been intense, which are captured in this thesis as 'intense narration moments' (see chapter four) that have not been subjected to focussed critical discourse analysis. This thesis contributes a comprehensive and detailed analysis of narration in three of them – GE10, SIR14, and GE15 - enabling the thesis to contribute to the literature case studies of the moments and to capture elite strategies in particular key moments and to contribute comparative analyses to understand changes and continuities within and between the moments.

The thesis also contributes a critical analysis of elites' discursive countering of challenges. Whilst these have major significance there is not yet a comprehensive analysis of Westminster's strategies for discursively countering the challenges, which is to be expected, given that they are recent developments.

There have also been analyses of financial elite narratives of the financial crisis. Hargie et al (2010) analysed the testimonies of four banking CEOs to the 2009 Banking Crisis Inquiry of the Treasury Committee of the House of Commons concerned with public apologies. Tourish and Hargie (2012) also analysed this text but were concerned with the use of metaphors to explain banking failures. Mueller and Whittle (2012) again analysed the same text but focussed on identity positioning in blame attribution discourses. Whittle and Mueller (2012) analysed it concerned with strategies for justifying actions and positioning through storytelling. Whittle and Mueller (2016) also presented an analysis of the text concerned with discourses of agency and structure in the financial crisis. Datz (2012) analysed a selection of texts by Bernanke, Chairman of the Federal Reserve 2006-2014, and Haldane, Chief Economist at the Bank of England, and the US Financial Crisis Inquiry, giving focus to the complexity of systems discourse.

There have also been analyses of elite narration of the crisis in different countries. Allen (2012) analysed a selection of Bank of Ireland reports, quarterly economic commentaries, an IMF report, Irish Business and Employers Confederation budget proposals published between 2007 and 2011 concerned with the narration of austerity in Ireland. Phelan (2011) analysed discourses for maintaining neoliberal hegemony in Ireland. Hansen and Movahedi (2010) analysed what they perceived to be a myth of universal greed used to explain the crisis in a US context. Love and Mattern (2011) analysed official and mainstream US Conservative and Liberal explanations of the crisis and responses. Pludwin (2011) analysed the identification of blameworthy subjects of the economic crisis in US political discourse between 2009 and 2011. Wilson and Anderson (2011), conducted critical discourse analysis of Obama's discourse on poverty. 't Hart and Tindall (2009) contribute a summary of the themes of narration across different countries identified by authors of chapters in their edited collection. Furthermore, there have been analyses of international bodies' narration of the crisis. Oosterlynck and González (2013) conducted an analysis of the representation of crisis and responses in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Local Economic and Employment Development and URBACT's, a EU funded exchange and learning programme, policies.

There have also been a number of insightful analyses of media narration of the conjuncture. Stanley (2012) analysed stigmatisation of investment bankers in *The Sun* newspaper articles and Robert Peston's blogs of 2008 and 2009 as well as bankers' narratives of financial crisis. Berry (2013) analysed six weeks of coverage of the financial crisis on the *BBC Radio 4 Today* programme, concerned with how limited sources restricted the range of debate. Berry (2015) analysed six national newspapers' coverage of austerity in 14 weekdays in 2009 and their role in legitimising the shift of the crisis from finance to public spending. Berry (2016) analysed 25 days of the *BBC News at Ten* in 2009 concerned with the coverage of the UK public deficit debate. Berry et al (2016) undertook quantitative content analysis of 2000 news stories from across Britain, Spain, Italy, Sweden, and Germany reporting the migrant crisis and contributed a comprehensive analysis of the different themes of the reporting. Kelsey (2014) analysed the representations of bankers in the *Mail Online* at the time of the financial crisis. Todd (2014) analysed media framings of the 'Better Together' and 'pro-independence' campaigns in the Scottish Independence Referendum, 2014. Kay

et al (2014) analysed the BBC's framing of the Coalition's cuts. Schifferes and Roberts (2015) present a collection of chapters on international media reporting of financial crises. Fairclough (2016) analysed two months of five newspapers coverage following the 2010 budget concerned with the reporting of Osborne's arguments for austerity. Others have contributed analyses of other country's media narration of their version of neoliberal crisis. von Scheve et al (2016) analysed 46 articles published by the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* between September 2008–2009 that were most pertinent to the financial crisis. There have also been analyses of representations of a particular nation's crisis in *other* nations' media narration. Antoniadis (2013) analysed the representation of the Greek crisis in international newspapers. Bickes et al (2014) conducted an analysis of the representation of the Greek crisis in a US, a German, and a UK news magazine. Tracy (2012) analysed the representation of the Greek crisis in US media.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarised the neoliberal crisis and positioned this research within the existing literature. It has explained that despite neoliberalism causing a major capitalist crisis the opportunity it presented was seized by *neoliberal* elites to intensify *neoliberalism*. Notwithstanding the harms, injustices, and seeming irrationalism of responses there was not a crisis of hegemony and acquiescence dominated in the period. This chapter has also summarised the existing literature analysing narration of the crisis and the lacunae this research addresses. Chapter four details the decision making in designing research to fill the lacunae.

Chapter Four

For Objective Partisanship: An Open and Detailed Explanation of the Research Design

Introduction

This chapter presents an open and detailed explanation of the decisions made when designing this research. Following an outline of the research questions, I justify why I have predominantly utilised Fairclough's framework of critical discourse analysis, highlight its key concepts and discuss some additional concepts that I developed during the analysis. I explain the criteria for the parent sample and the process I undertook for distilling the data. I then discuss the analysis process and the structuring of the findings and analysis chapters. Finally, I justify taking the approach of objective partisanship.

Research Questions

1. How did Westminster definers narrate the crises of the conjuncture to the British public between 2010 and 2015?
2. How did Westminster definers narrate crises responses and proposed responses to the British public between 2010 and 2015?
3. How did Westminster definers narrate challenges by political definers who identified alternative causes, and advocated alternative responses and ‘resolutions’ between 2010 and 2015?
4. How did Westminster definers’ narration of the conjuncture to the British public develop between 2010 and 2015?

Question one was concerned with discursive techniques for creating a sense of crisis, identifying causes, the naming of crises, and therefore attribution of blame. Question two required an analysis of discursive techniques for promoting and legitimising some responses, and delegitimising and excluding other responses. It is closely connected to question one because blame frames have concomitant responses and take off or move down the agenda other responses. Question three reflects developments in the period. As countering challenges became an important element of the narration of the crisis that grew in significance as the crisis developed, their narration became a key focus of the research. Challenges in the period of analysis included: the SNP’s anti-austerity, pro-social justice challenge in SIR14; the SNP, Green Party, and Plaid Cymru’s anti-austerity, pro-social justice challenge in GE15; and UKIP’s nationalist pursuit of UK ‘independence’ from the EU seeking to restrain the movement of people in GE15. Question four gave focus to the process and development of narration over the period considering continuities, shifts, and changes when narrating causes, responses and proposed responses, and challenges. It required discussion of which discourses became prominent and dominated and which faded and were marginalised, what new discourses emerged and which left or returned. It was concerned with what Fairclough (2000: 12) terms “preparing the ground”, the gradual dissemination of ideas and arguments to attain consent for major changes. It also gave attention to the timing of definers’ ‘news’ and the shifting of the terrain of debates. It necessitated reflection on

continuities and differences between narration in 2010 and 2015 and how the narrative contributed to the form of ‘resolution’ Britain was experiencing and moving towards.

Critical Discourse Analysis

As the central concern of this research is official discourse, and a critical perspective underpins it, it follows that I undertook critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is a collection of theoretical and methodological approaches concerned with analysing texts, including images, that transmit ideological knowledge and exercise power (Cameron and Panović, 2014; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). It recognises that semiosis is a key part of social processes that produce and reproduce domination, injustice, and inequality. Analysing texts illuminates ideological policing; the role of language in legitimising structures and relations of inequality that inflict harm (Fairclough, 2003, 2009, 2010). It is “fundamentally interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 10).

CDA analyses the ways “a society constitutes and maintains itself and the consciousness of its members” (Fowler, 1981: 25). It is concerned with the ways that definers construct and narrate objects, actions, moments, power relations, social groups, and identities in particular contexts to manage sense-making (Fairclough, 2010). Strategies used in the encoding process are analysed (Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002). It allows for an understanding of representations of reality and the way some actions are framed as necessary or desirable and others as undesirable (ibid).

CDA is concerned with the *relationship* between language and “issues, problems, changes” (Fairclough, 2009: 166). Importantly, it is “not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 2). It is “socially orientated” as opposed to linguistically orientated (Fairclough, 2003). CDA analyses “what happens when people talk and write” (Fairclough, 2010: 3), “the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality” (Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002: 21). It recognises that ideologies and discourses “play an active role in creating and changing” the “world, identities, and social relations” (ibid: 1).

Critical discourse analysts “are socio-politically committed to social equality and justice” (van Dijk, 2009: 63) seeking “to contribute to” addressing “the social ‘wrongs’ of the day” (Fairclough, 2009: 163). Social wrongs are defined as “aspects of social systems, forms or orders which are detrimental to human well-being and which could in principle be ameliorated if not eliminated, though perhaps only through major changes in these systems, forms, or orders” (ibid: 167-168). CDA allows the exploration of relationships between texts and events, social structures and power relations (Fairclough, 2010). For Fairclough (2010: 21), it can contribute to tackling the fundamental problems that “neo-liberal capitalism has either failed adequately to address or contributed to exacerbating: poverty, gross inequality, injustice, insecurity, ecological hazard”. It can contrast official claims with empirical evidence revealing official narratives’ service to powerful interests.

Different theoretical and methodological approaches to CDA have different “philosophical premises” and “specific techniques for analysis” (Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002: 4). I chose to predominantly draw upon Fairclough’s framework because it aligned with the research questions, but I was open to drawing upon other frameworks to facilitate the analysis. A corpus linguistics approach to CDA is largely a quantitative approach involving large corpora, generally analysed through computer software, and its primary purpose is to identify the frequency of words (Cameron and Panović, 2014). It can be used to identify the key terms for representing an issue and to draw comparisons, between use of words and word use over time (Cameron and Panović, 2014; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). This approach does not facilitate a thorough and detailed qualitative analysis of texts necessary for answering the research questions, therefore I did not widely utilise it. However, I did draw upon it to facilitate an analysis of the extent of ‘embattled language’ (a concept of Fairclough’s framework) in the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014. I compared the frequency of the use of the word change in Cameron’s early text of the campaign to the frequency it was used in his text the week of the vote. Whilst there are tensions between Foucault and postmodernism, and the theoretical framework underpinning this research, I was open to drawing upon the concepts that formed his CDA framework. For example, ‘regimes of truth’ and ‘subjugated knowledge’ could have been used to explain that Westminster definers operated to ensure their discourses dominated, and unfavourable knowledge, information, and evidence was excluded and discredited. However, I

found the concepts of Fairclough's framework most useful for undertaking a detailed analysis of the texts and answering the research questions, given that his framework has been developed to analyse political elites' narration of capitalism. It is also important to note that there are some similar concepts within different frameworks, for example Fairclough's (2003, 2010) use of 'order of discourse' and Foucault's concept of 'regimes of truth'.

Norman Fairclough's framework is grounded in Marxism and he designed it specifically for analysing *in detail* political elites' language in capitalist societies (see Fairclough, 2010). His approach was explicitly constructed for analysing "legitimisation of...social orders" and "hegemonic struggles" (Fairclough's, 2003: 7). He recognises that neoliberalism was driven, implemented and continues to be sustained by discourses, and that narration has been crucial to its legitimisation during the capitalist crisis (see Fairclough, 2010). For Fairclough (2010: 15), the neoliberal capitalist crisis is the "the primary factor shaping the agenda for critical discourse analysis for some time to come" and analysts should be concerned with neoliberal discursive strategies for managing the crisis. In his manifesto for CDA, Fairclough (2010: 19) states that the agenda should be for analysts to:

"identify the range of discourses that emerge and their link to emerging strategies. Show how the range of discourses changes over time as the crisis develops. Identify differences and commonalities between discourses...how they represent events and actions and the social agents, objects, institutions...how they narrate past and present events and actions...how they justify actions and policy proposals and legitimise...changed practices".

He suggests that this might include "analysis of explanations of the crisis and attributions of blame" and strategies for legitimising particular responses and affecting the development of crisis" (ibid: 6). Fairclough (2010: 18) asserts that focus should also be given to analysing the strategies of groups engaging in struggles and contestation, in particular those that attain the power to shape "structures and systems" and perhaps even transform them. He also suggested that analyses should "show how particular discourses gain dominance or become marginalised over time" (ibid: 19). Clear alignment between this research's theoretical framework, research questions, and planned contribution, and Fairclough's framework and attached manifesto meant his framework for CDA was the most appropriate for this research. As the following

chapters illustrate it effectively facilitated a detailed analysis of texts answering the research questions.

Fairclough's Framework

Echoing the definitions of discourse provided in chapter one, Fairclough uses the term 'discourse' in three ways: the social practice of language use; the language used in a particular field, for example political discourse, and thirdly, "a way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective" for example, a neoliberal discourse of power relations or a Marxist discourse of power relations (Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002: 66-67). He uses the term *text* to refer to written, spoken, or illustrated items, for example a speech, poster, or debate transcript (Fairclough, 2010). For Fairclough (2010: 94) "each discursive event has three dimensions or facets: it is a spoken or written language text, it is an instance of discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of text, and it is a piece of social practice", the latter referring to its effects in the social world.

Two concepts of Fairclough's framework are *interdiscursivity* and *intertextuality*. Interdiscursivity is concerned with analysing which "discourses, genres and styles are drawn upon in a text and how they are articulated together" (Fairclough, 2010: 7). Definers may draw upon an historical contextualisation document (genre) data from interviews (genre), recommendations from a report (genre), present themselves as authoritative (style) or as 'one of us' (style), incorporate business friendly arguments (discourse) with traditional Labour discourse of social justice (discourse). Intertextuality refers to "the presence of actual elements of other texts within a text", either directly through quotations or indirectly through paraphrasing (Fairclough, 2003: 39). Others' texts or voices "may be specifically attributed to particular people or non-specifically (vaguely) attributed", an example of the latter is "some say" (ibid: 48).

Fairclough's (2003: 164) concepts of modality and evaluation are concerned with "what authors commit themselves to, with respect to what is true and what is necessary (modality), and with respect to what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad (evaluation)" or important. There are "implicit and explicit ways in which authors commit themselves to values" (ibid: 171). "Assumptions about what is good or

desirable” may underpin texts, for example neoliberal discourses assume efficiency is desirable (ibid: 55). There may be: “existential assumptions: assumptions about what exists” and “propositional assumptions: assumptions about what is or can be or will be the case” (ibid: 55). As the findings and analysis chapters evidence, modality and evaluation commitments permeated Westminster’s narration of the crisis.

Fairclough (2003: 105) differentiates between “knowledge exchange” dialogue and “activity exchange” dialogue. Knowledge exchange “may be relatively explicit or implicit” (ibid: 71). Implicit knowledge comes in two forms: knowledge that is assumed to already be known and therefore not explicitly stated, and “the strategic avoidance of explicitness” (ibid: 60). Definers may choose to imply knowledge as opposed to making an explicit statement in order to avoid or minimise criticism. Texts in elections and referendums are by definition activity exchange texts because their purpose is to encourage the public to vote a particular way but they are also knowledge exchange texts. In some cases definers may strategically present their texts as knowledge exchange texts but they also seek to encourage a particular activity (ibid). The text’s role in making people act in a particular way may be “implicitly” “persuasive”, more subtle, less obvious, a “soft sell” rather than a “hard sell” (ibid: 111) it may “covertly invite action” (ibid: 112). For example, constructions of the other may encourage coldness but also reinforce the importance of ‘us’ upholding ‘our’ ‘non-deviant’ behaviour.

Laclau and Mouffee (cited in Fairclough, 2003: 100) write of a “logic of ‘difference’” and “a logic of ‘equivalence’”. The former refers to the creation and proliferation of “differences between objects entities, groups of people, etc.” and the latter refers to “collapsing or ‘subverting’ differences by representing objects, entities, groups of people, etc. as equivalent to each other” (Fairclough, 2003: 88). Classifications, both what individuals, groups, and actions are classified with and separated from, shape how people think about them (ibid). Fairclough (2003: 88) applies this idea to words stating that “the ‘work’ of classification is constantly going on in texts, with entities being either differentiated from one another, put in opposition to one another, or being set up as equivalent to one another”. Some words are combined in ways that suggest accommodations whereas other words are constructed as opposing (ibid). Words become hyponyms of other words, for example, under neoliberalism “‘globalisation’

became a hyponym of ‘economic progress’” (ibid: 130). Classifications that have attained the status of common sense are “naturalised preconstructions...that are ignored as such and which can function as unconscious instruments of construction” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 241). They are “pre-constructed and taken for granted ‘di-visions’ through which people continuously generate ‘visions’ of the world” (Fairclough, 2003: 130).

“Mythopoesis” may be utilised to argue for particular actions and take off the agenda other actions (Fairclough, 2003: 99). A definer’s story may suggest that good things will happen if a particular action is taken, but bad things will happen if it is not taken. Activity exchange discourses, logics of difference and equivalence, and mythopoesis are particularly useful concepts for analysing elections and a referendum because politicians present options, frame their options as desirable and counter support of others in order to invoke particular actions. As Fairclough’s work and the findings and analysis chapters here demonstrate, they are key strategies for advocating a set of responses for the ‘resolution’ of crisis whilst excluding others.

“Nominalisation, is a type of grammatical metaphor which represents processes as entities by transforming clauses (including verbs) into a type of noun” (Fairclough, 2003: 220). For example, the phrase ‘bankers mis-sold mortgages’ is what Fairclough (ibid: 220) terms a “non-metaphorical representation of a process” whereas ‘mortgage mis-selling’ is what he calls “a metaphorical nominalised representation”. The removal of social actors from sentences can be undertaken in attempt to obscure “agency and responsibility” (ibid: 13). Mortgage mis-selling becomes framed as something that just happens as opposed to something that is consciously executed and someone or some group’s fault (ibid). Also, removing social actors who are victims from texts can depersonalise issues in attempt to hide victimisation and obscure human impact of actions. Rather than deaths of ill benefit claimants, Westminster’s phrase of choice is ‘benefit-related death’.

Some discursive techniques are used to obscure the relationship between the powerful and the less powerful (Fairclough, 2003). It is commonplace for leaders of political parties to say ‘I’ in their speeches to simulate “person-to-person communication”, and construct a sense of direct relationship between the leader and the individual (ibid: 76).

Political texts may include an “inclusive ‘we’” in attempt to reduce perceptions of “hierarchy and distance by implying that all of ‘us’ are in the same boat” (ibid: 76). Politicians may talk about ‘our’ experiences, feelings and desires, making “strong truth claims about the mental processes of others” (ibid: 171). “The power of making statements on behalf of others, or indeed on behalf of ‘all of us’...is a power which has an uneven social distribution” (ibid: 171). As chapter six evidences this was a discursive technique of Better Together definers in SIR14.

Whilst analysing the data I developed analytical concepts to identify discursive techniques that could not be explained using either concepts from Fairclough’s framework or concepts in the other literature that I had reviewed. One of these was *explicit attachment*. This concept can be used to identify when definers insert names of subjects into the name they give the phenomena. It attaches subjects to issues to more explicitly attribute blame and direct consequences towards the subject. Fairclough (2003: 145) recognised that social actors can be “activated” or “passivated” (ibid: 145). In explicit attachment they are activated. As chapters five and seven discuss, this was a key strategy for Conservatives blaming the crisis on Labour.

A second analytical concept was *darkness to lightness comparisons* or alternatively *lightness to darkness comparisons*. The former encourage a perception of success and the latter encourage a perception of failure and decline. Such comparisons were used to argue that an approach and wider ‘resolution’ were successful. Challengers can use lightness to darkness comparisons to highlight the harm and other negative outcomes of approaches and ‘resolutions’.

Data Distillation

The data was ‘naturally occurring’ (see Lewis and Nicholls, 2014). It existed independently of the research as opposed to being specifically generated for it. However, no data is “untouched by human hands” (Silverman, 2011: 274). Given that definers engaged in “intensive ideological work” (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 300), therefore disseminating a large number of texts, I designed a process for distilling the data.

The research questions determined the criteria for inclusion in the parent sample, which was:

- Oral or written text or images disseminated to the British public between 2010 and 2015
- Constructed by a Westminster definer
- Concerned with crisis, causes, responses and proposed responses, and challenges

A British Case Study

The research is a case study of political elite narration of the neoliberal crisis in a British context. As Whyte (2007: 113) states “the struggle for hegemony is a process of political rule located at the level of the nation state”. Although the crisis was experienced across a range of places, its causes, responses, and challenges were nationally varied (see Clarke, 2010a). Also discourses are historically and *spatially* significant (Fairclough, 2010). Crises, even global ones, are narrated differently in different places and at different times.

I chose to analyse narration in Britain as opposed to the UK because Northern Irish politics was distinct from British politics. Key definers in Northern Ireland were different from the key definers in Britain⁵³ and they had separate texts. As The Guardian (2017) state, “Northern Ireland has its own narrative”. Whilst Scotland and Wales had *some* separate texts, Westminster definers were key definers for Scottish and Welsh residents during the period of 2010-2015 and, as the period progressed, SNP and Plaid Cymru definers attained a platform to widely narrate the crisis across Britain, in a way Northern Irish definers had not by 2015. This is evident in the seven way election debates of GE15. In summary, although there were variations and local differences, there was trans-nation narration between England, Wales, and Scotland whereas Northern Ireland narration differed and was separate to a significantly greater degree.

Westminster Narration

⁵³ This is reflected in Northern Irish constituencies election of DUP, Sinn Féin, SDLP and Ulster Union candidates and one independent (see BBC News, 2015a).

Berry (2013, 2015, 2016) undertook source content analysis of key media outlets' reporting of the crisis. He identified political elites, particularly Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats, as dominating narration, City elites as key narrators, and the Bank of England as a prominent source. SNP narrators were key contributors to the narrative in Scotland and from 2013 UKIP became key narrators across Britain, and in GE15 Green Party and Plaid Cymru attained a platform to narrate the crisis to Britain.

However, it was not feasible to analyse the texts of all definers that contributed to official discourse given time and word count restraints. Westminster definers were the key narrators of the crisis, responses and proposed responses, and challenges, and possessed the power to determine Britain's 'resolution' to crisis. Therefore, I decided to undertake a detailed analysis of Westminster narration, rather than a less thorough analysis of texts by all contributors to official discourse. This meant analysing Labour, Conservatives, and Liberal Democrats' texts. I also conducted a comparatively brief analysis of key texts by the SNP, Green Party, Plaid Cymru, UKIP, and Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell to summarise their narratives in order to contextualise Westminster's narration of challenges.

A Longitudinal Study

This research contributes a longitudinal analysis of crisis narration. I examined the specificity of discourse in different key moments over the crisis and the development of narration. The design of this research recognises that attaining and maintaining hegemony is a process that whilst continuous has particular moments when narration intensifies. Chilton's (1987: 2) concept of "critical discourse moments" captures when a particular topic is most visible and narration gives particular focus to it (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). In this thesis I refer to intense narration moments (INMs) to capture moments when the public sphere becomes saturated with texts about a particular topic and public debate gives intensified focus to it. Intense narration moments can be created for a diverse range of issues but they include when a major action needs to be legitimised, a proposed 'resolution' mandated, or a challenge, to a key response or the wider project, countered.

Initially I selected the time period of 2007-2015 because the crisis began to emerge in 2007 and I chose to determine the end of the period of focus at 2015 because it would

be the year of a General Election, therefore allowing the incorporation of a key moment and still allowing for the research to be feasible within the allocated timeframe. It was not possible to analyse the challenges that developed after GE15 in this research project due to time and word restraints. Consequently, the Corbyn-led movement had to lie outside of the remit of this research. It requires the attention of a further research project and consideration is given to this in the thesis conclusion.

I identified five intense narration moments on the topics of crisis, responses, and challenges within the period of 2007-2015, these were: the October banking crisis and bailout 2008, the General Election 2010, the ‘riots’ of 2011, the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014, the General Election 2015. It was not possible to conduct a systematic, rigorous, comprehensive, and detailed analysis of all five moments, therefore I had to decide which to include and exclude from this research. I began the analysis of one moment and then once I had determined the time it would take and the space in the thesis that would be required to present a detailed analysis of a moment I decided to analyse three moments.

I chose to analyse the two General Elections because they are always moments when the public sphere is saturated with political elites’ texts identifying ‘key’ issues and suggesting responses, and for GE10 and GE15 the crisis, responses and proposed responses were central topics. GE15 was also a moment in which challenges were presented and discursively countered by Westminster. Analysing these moments also allowed a comparative analysis of two similar moments, which offered insights into the development of Westminster narration over the period. Notwithstanding the intensity of narration in these two moments or their significance in the narration of the neoliberal crisis, there were not comprehensive analyses of narration of these moments in the literature (as shown in Appendix A).

I decided to analyse the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 intense narration moment. Although the referendum was to determine the constitution of the UK, it was a moment in which the SNP presented a challenge to Westminster’s crisis ‘resolution’. In retrospect it can be understood as the first of a number of challenges to the neoliberal ‘resolution’ that belatedly emerged and gained momentum and significance in the following years. Although only Scottish residents could vote, the moment was narrated

across Britain. It was the first moment in which Westminster discursively countered a challenge. There is also an absence of a comprehensive analysis of Westminster's narration of the SNP challenge in SIR14 in the existing literature (again as shown in Appendix A).

Whilst the 2011 'riots' presented resistance to inequality, particularly the consequences of the crisis response of austerity, the character of the resistance was clearly different to the SNP, Green party, Plaid Cymru's, and UKIP's challenges. There have been numerous analyses of Westminster definers' narration of the 'riots' (see Bennett, 2013; Cooper, 2012; Heap and Smithson, 2012) and this was a key reason why the moment was not selected. As the review of the literature in chapter three shows, focus has been given to narration of the financial crisis and the couple of years following its aftermath. Significantly less attention has been given to the elections and the Scottish Independence Referendum. In summary, the three moments were chosen to aid comparison, to reflect the developing significance of challenges, and to contribute a comprehensive analysis of key moments given less attention in the existing literature.

Determining the Text Selection Process

It was not possible to analyse all the texts that fitted within the criteria of the parent sample. I identified three possible processes for producing a feasible data set. One option was to read all of the available texts within the parameters that my decisions so far had set and then select which to include using my own judgements of most interesting and most insightful discourses of Westminster crisis narration. A second option was to determine the most high profile texts that were key to Westminster narration of the crisis, responses and proposed responses, and challenges disseminated directly to the public and widely shared through the media, for example a budget statement, and the most pertinent texts produced through Westminster definer direct engagement with the media, for example a radio interview. The former would be determined by academic judgement of importance and significance, and the latter by the highest audience figures, which meant they had been subjected to the widest public decoding. Stanley (2012) took this approach. She analysed the texts of the sources that were on the topics her research was concerned with and most widely read by her audience of concern. A third option was to list and number all the items of the texts within the chosen parameters and then randomly select them.

There were advantages and disadvantages to all three processes. Whilst the first option offered freedom to wander through all the available data it had a number of disadvantages. It would be very time consuming and the large data set would have been too much to analyse given the time restrictions on the research. Also I could have left myself open to accusations of sampling bias, as data selection would not be systematic.

Option two would not allow the freedom to wander through the data, perhaps resulting in the exclusion of interesting and important aspects of Westminster narration. However, academic judgement *could* be used to include texts outside of the boundaries. A key advantage of this option was that it was more rigorous. It was systematic in its approach; there was a methodical plan and the decisions were more transparent. Consequently, the research would be less open to accusations of bias and questions about the quality of the conclusions. Subjective decisions would be made but they would be informed by academic judgment of most significant texts for narration to the British public and information on the prominence of texts and public interaction with texts. Fundamentally, this option ensured that analysis was focussed upon high profile texts that the public were most likely to have been decoded. It also facilitated constructing a manageable sample as texts could be placed in a hierarchy of significance and public interaction with a line drawn at the point where time limits of the research and space in the thesis dictated.

A key advantage of option three was that accusations of bias were less likely but a major disadvantage was that key texts could be excluded. It would have been difficult to claim that the thesis contributed an analysis of Westminster narration of the crisis in GE15 and not include a General Election televised debate.

When deciding between the processes I focussed on two matters. Firstly, the overarching concerns of the research and secondly, the importance of rigorous and systematic data collection and analysis for quality research. As the overarching concern was Westminster narration to the public, I had to make a distinction between publicly available texts and the texts that are widely decoded by the public. Option two focussed on texts that the public were most likely to have decoded. If the question

was: ‘what did I find most interesting from a critical criminological perspective in Westminster definers’ texts narrating the crisis, responses and proposed responses, and challenges then option one would have been most appropriate. If it were ‘what are some of the ways the crisis and responses were discussed in the publicly available data?’ then option three would have been suitable. For research to be of a high quality, data selection and analysis must be rigorous and systematic (see Fairclough, 2010; Spencer et al, 2014a; Wahidin and Moore, 2011). Options two and three were most methodical and ordered by a rigorous system but option three did not ensure the inclusion of key texts that the public were most likely to have decoded. Consequently, option two was most appropriate. Therefore the criteria for selecting the texts from within the parent sample was:

- The key types of texts (determined by academic judgement) produced by Westminster definers to narrate the crisis, responses and proposed responses, and challenges, directly disseminated to the public. Given their importance, these texts are widely shared through the media. Therefore there are direct and, what Fairclough (2000: 13) terms, indirect⁵⁴ readers, or more accurately there are indirect decoders.
- Westminster definers key texts produced by their engagement with the media that had high audience figures

Many of the texts that I analysed were key types of texts determined by academic judgment and the justification for their selection was simply that they were of crucial importance to an analysis of the INM. For example, narration of a General Election cannot be rigorously analysed without examining manifestos.

However, some text selections were not as straightforward. I analysed all of *The Andrew Marr Show* interviews of key Westminster definers on the topics of crisis, responses and proposed responses, and challenges disseminated for GE15 and SIR14. I considered but excluded other political television programmes. *The Andrew Marr Show* usually has viewing figures of 1.8million but it increases significantly when the

⁵⁴ Indirect readers may watch a video clip of a Chancellor’s speech shown on the news or read quotes from a Prime Minister’s speech in a newspaper.

interviewee is talking about something particularly topical. For example, three million viewers watched Hilary Benn's interview when Corbyn removed him from his cabinet (see Plunkett, 2016). Several programmes were excluded because of their low viewing figures⁵⁵. However, *Question Time* has higher regular viewing figures than *The Andrew Marr Show* at 2.7 million viewers so, arguably, this could have been included in the sample. However, it was not, for several reasons. Firstly, *The Andrew Marr Show* claims to be (and is) the place: "top politicians make news" and "the UK's most influential commentators share their analysis and insights" (BBC, 2015). "The Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and other senior figures in public life frequently appear on the agenda-setting interview programme" (ibid), whereas those appearing on *Question Time* tend to have a lower profile and had a lesser role in narrating the crisis to the public. *The Andrew Marr Show* is a place of important and "memorable moments" (BBC, 2015). High profile interviews happen and key political announcements are made. Key comments from these texts are shared through other media outlets. For example, on the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme excerpts of *The Andrew Marr Show* interviews are shared or comments are starting points for interviews with other Westminster definers and 'experts'. *Question Time* does not have these characteristics, or has them to a lesser degree. Not only are the audience figures for *The Andrew Marr Show* comparatively high, there are also many indirect decoders. Additionally, transcripts are available for the show on the BBC's website, which significantly aided the analysis process. However, only transcripts from 2011 were available for analysis therefore this source was utilised for analysing SIR14 INM and GE15 INM but not GE10 INM.

For the GE15 INM I analysed interviews of key Westminster definers on the topics of crisis, responses and proposed responses, and challenges from the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme. The programme has 6.97 million listeners (BBC News, 2013b). This is second to BBC Radio 2 *Breakfast Show*, which has the highest figure at 10.97 million

⁵⁵ Daily Politics and Sunday Politics were also considered. Daily Politics had its 'highest audience in years and twice its usual viewers' at "over half a million" when Jeremy Corbyn featured (Stone, 2015a), but this is comparatively low therefore less people decode the programme than *The Andrew Marr Show*. Similarly, News night was excluded because its viewing figures were 549 000 – 606 000 viewers (see Plunkett, 2014). Neither are 'agenda setting' to the degree of *The Andrew Marr Show*.

listeners (ibid). However, unlike the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programmes, the BBC Radio 2 *Breakfast Show* does not have the status as a key platform for political elite narration. The *Today* programme is a “flagship news and current affairs programme” that has access to political elites and “major players in the [financial] industry” (Berry, 2013: 253, 267). In 2005 in response to a survey MPs voted the *Today* programme “the most influential programme in setting the political agenda” and it ranked highly in influencing voters (BBC News, 2005). Like *The Andrew Marr Show*, the content of the interviews also sets the news “in other parts of the media” (Berry, 2013: 267). The BBC does not produce transcripts of the *Today* programme interviews and each episode can only be listened to on the BBC’s website for 4 weeks after it has been aired. There are some clips available on Box of Broadcasts, an off-air recording service that I had access to, but they are not comprehensive enough for the requirements of this research. From January 2015 until September 2015 I recorded each Radio 4 *Today* interview of a Westminster definer that discussed this research’s topics of concern. Therefore this source was only available for the GE15 INM analysis.

On occasion I analysed data outside of the selected INMs in order to further explore issues that arose from analysing texts within the sample. For example, I analysed each of Osborne’s budgets between 2010 and 2015, some of which were disseminated outside of the INMs. In GE10 Conservatives were arguing the necessity of austerity and in SIR14 and GE15 despite economic failings, they were constructing it as a successful strategy that needed to be continued. However, in 2012 failure led to Osborne materially, and somewhat clandestinely, changing direction. I chose to analyse his budgets to examine his narration of this shift and its continuities and changes. A full list of the texts selected for analysis is provided in Appendix B.

The Data Analysis Process and Structuring the Findings and Analysis Chapters

I analysed the data in moments (rather than by data type, for example all television debates at once, or by definer) in order to immerse myself in the moment and to facilitate an understanding of how the texts collectively functioned in the moment. I analysed each text in date order within the INM to track changes *within* the moment. I made notes, including pertinent quotes, of all the elements of the texts that answered the research questions. I organised them into themes as I analysed the texts and noted relevant concepts from Fairclough’s framework and the wider literature as I did this.

I decided to structure my findings and analysis chapters, not by research questions, but by INMs in chronological order. I reasoned that as narration of the causes of crisis is so closely linked to narration of responses and proposed responses, it would be awkward for their analysis to be separate. I also reasoned that the public make sense of crisis, responses, and challenges informed by the range Westminster narrators and their texts within particular moments, whilst also incorporating previously attained knowledge, and that this should be reflected in the structuring of the findings and analysis chapters. This structure also allows the chapters to be stand-alone case studies of the moments that can be read separately if interests require them to be. Consequently, several or all of the findings and analysis chapters and the conclusion answers each research question as shown in table one.

Table One: Structure of the Findings and Analysis Chapters

Chapter	Research Questions Answered
5: critical analysis of the GE10 INM	1, 2, 4
6: critical analysis of the SIR14 INM	2, 3, 4
7: critical analysis of the GE15 INM	1, 2, 3, 4
conclusion	1, 2, 3, 4

For Objective Partisanship

Positivist theorists claim the ability to apply natural science’s ideals of value-neutrality to social science (Hammersley, 2000). However, value-neutrality in social research is an “illusion” (Tombs and Whyte, 2003: 230). For Gramsci, meaning and consciousness cannot be understood through the adoption of the principles of natural scientific study (Femia, 1981). It is, on this view, impossible to undertake social research “uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies” (Becker, 1967: 239). Our values inform the issues we study, the standpoint we take, and the theories and concepts we select to make sense of the issues (see Becker, 1967; C Wright Mills, 2000 [1959]; Gouldner, 1973, 1962; Power, 2003). A researcher tends to select their

research topic because of an “intense interest” or “passionate concern” (Moustakas, 1990: 27), or personal experiences (Finlay, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). As explained in the thesis introduction, the idea for the research developed from an intense concern about the harms of crisis responses on vulnerable groups and a desire to understand how primary definers were seeking to justify what empirical evidence showed was not only harmful and unjust but unnecessary. My perspective led me to utilise a neo-Marxist theoretical framework.

Notwithstanding the inherence of values, some research students are advised to support the façade of value-neutrality, to occupy the ‘middle ground’, and create ‘balanced’ arguments” in order to be ‘good scholars’ (Hall and Winlow, 2012: 5). They are told to see both sides, sit on the fence, and to not be *too political* that they alienate others (ibid). However, by taking the middle ground we do not extract ourselves from the realm of values and politics; the middle ground is still a political position (ibid: 5). As Gouldner (1973: 56) states, “all standpoints are partisan: and, granted no one escapes a partisan standpoint”. Claiming to take a value-neutral approach leaves researchers open to conducting research that supports non-progressive and harmful activities because it is indifferent to the moral consequences of research (Gouldner, 1962). From a ‘value free’ standpoint “there is no reason why one cannot sell his knowledge to spread a disease just as freely as he can to fight it” (ibid: 204). Morally and ethically we must be aware of the political and moral meaning and consequences of our research (C Wright Mills, 2000 [1959]).

Undertaking research openly informed by a political standpoint does not mean that the research is not objective. Partisan research should not be viewed as necessarily producing biased and problematic conclusions. A partisan researcher can take an objective approach and therefore produce trustworthy conclusions about important social and political issue they are deeply concerned about (see Gouldner, 1973; Tombs and Whyte, 2003).

Hammersley (2000) argues that truth should be the only value that informs the research and the researcher should strive for value-neutrality beyond a commitment to truth to

prevent bias⁵⁶ and contamination of research conclusions. He assumes that there is a conflict between truth and the researcher's values, and the partisan researcher will prioritise the latter. However, those truly committed to justice and equality recognise the value of truth. They identify areas of real injustice and inequality and struggle for the truth that the powerful may seek to obscure. They know that their arguments are more powerful when they cannot be accused of deviating from truth.

Hammersley (2006: 16) defines objectivity as pursuing "research in the way that 'anyone' would pursue it who was committed to discovering the truth, whatever their personal characteristics or social position appealing only to data that are observable by 'anyone'". However, as the social research process is intrinsically linked to our positions, our position *will* influence our conclusions. Observing the same reality from different epistemological perspectives will result in different arguments being constructed. A neo-Marxist analysing Osborne's texts is likely to produce a different analysis to Osborne's analysis of them.

"Being objective, then, cannot be a question of 'ridding oneself of preconceptions' (we cannot look at the world and see 'facts' without prior concepts), but is a matter of not cheating – not refusing to see what one's own (pre)conceptions suggest reality is like; and certainly, seeing if other people's conceptions make better sense of it" (Leys, 1989: 5).

Tombs and Whyte (2003) conceptualise objectivity as open and honest research that is rigorous in its approach and where decisions can be explained to show that political commitments did not negatively bias the research and therefore the findings are trustworthy. As partisan researchers our values and political commitment may very well guide our choices over what to research but we can still attain what Hammersley (2000: 125) calls "methodological purism", which is "high methodological standards, and a resistance to deviation from those standards for reasons of personal preference, expediency, social pressure". Indeed a critical stance is more likely to raise our sensitivity to the more insidious and structural 'social pressures' to which Hammersley refers. Research that *systematically*, *comprehensively* and *transparently* analyses representative data can produce strong and trustworthy explanations and arguments (Ormston et al, 2014). Arguments are more powerful when they cannot be discredited

⁵⁶ Hammersley and Gomm (2000: 165) define bias as "culpable systematic error".

for poor research quality. Therefore prioritising rigour is key for ensuring strength of arguments emanating from the analyses. As the data naturally exists and is all publicly available those assessing the quality of the research can easily see my interpretation and assess its representativeness.

Gouldner (1973) suggests there are three types of sociological objectivity. “Normative objectification” is the application of values that we explicitly identify as our own (ibid: 57). “Personal authenticity” ensures that we do not deceive ourselves by pretending that the bases of our judgements are different from what they are (ibid: 59). For example, we do not decide to exclude a piece of data because it does not support our arguments but falsely claim that it is not a key text. The third type is “transpersonal replicability”, which is when we are so clear in describing key parts of the research process that others could repeat the research from the *same standpoint* and arrive at the same conclusions (ibid: 57). This chapter has aimed to clearly describe the research process.

In summary, we must engage in *overt* partisanship (Becker, 1967; C Wright Mills, 2000 [1959]; Tombs and Whyte, 2003), abandon “pretensions to value-neutrality” (Tombs and Whyte, 2003: 232), and be self-aware (C Wright Mills, 2000 [1959]). Given that one perspective or another underpins all social research and that transparency is a key marker of research quality, the quality of the research is higher when “researchers recognise, describe, and are open about the perspective from which their research commitments, questions, and modes of analysis and dissemination originate” (Tombs and Whyte, 2003: 230). This thesis has been open about my perspective and the research design decisions. “We take sides as our personal and political commitments dictate, use our theoretical and technical resources to avoid...distortions...[and] limit our conclusions carefully” (Becker, 1967: 247).

Conclusion

This chapter has explained and justified the design of the research. It has presented the research questions, justified the methodology and explained the concepts of the framework for analysis. It has discussed the criteria for the parent sample and transparently explained the data distillation process to show it was systematic and rigorous. It has justified the decision to present the findings and analysis chapters as

case studies of moments and to take an approach of overt partisanship whilst ensuring objectivity. The following chapters present the findings and analysis in three case studies of moments.

Chapter Five

A Critical Analysis of Westminster's Narration of the General Election 2010

Introduction

This chapter contributes an analysis of Westminster's narration of the General Election of 2010, including the campaign, results, and aftermath. It examines the discursive strategies for legitimising the continuation and intensification, rather than the logical replacement, of neoliberal crisis causing conditions. It is argued that definers sought to deflect blame for financial crisis from the neoliberal project, relocate the origins of economic crisis in the public sector and immorality, position private capital as the public's saviour, and frame individual responsibility as the key to halting Britain's 'decline'.

'Competing' to Implement a Neoliberal 'Resolution' to the Crisis

The economy was the central concern of the election. The UK had just emerged from a five-quarter-long recession (BBC News, 2015b). Unemployment had risen from 5 percent in 2007 to 8 percent (BBC News, 2010a). Growth remained fragile; one reason was that the public were spending less because they were concerned about job security (Press Association, 2010). The interest rate remained at the historic low of 0.5 percent

and quantitative easing continued (Kollewe, 2009). Opening the final televised debate of the election, David Dimbleby (in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) stated, “tonight, a large part of the debate will be on the state of the country's economy - the recession, the national debt, unemployment, the issues that many people believe will decide this election”.

Dominating official discourse, Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrat definers confined debate within neoliberal boundaries, identified ideologically advantageous ‘causes’, and competed to present their variation of neoliberal responses as the route to ‘resolution’. They presented a powerful consensus that directed Britain to a new normality of enhanced neoliberalism. Collectively the three parties attained 88.1 percent of votes, Conservatives were most successful but were required to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats (BBC News, 2010b). There was an absence of challenges, which, in contrast to SIR14 and GE15, meant Westminster did not have to engage in discursive countering of them.

Dislocating the Financial Crisis From Neoliberalism: Blaming Bankers’ Immorality

In major divergence from pre-crisis constructions of finance operating according to ‘natural forces’ and bankers undertaking useful economic functions (Froud et al, 2010b), in 2008 the mainstream media constructed bankers as immorally taking risks to serve their own interests (Stanley, 2012). Investment bankers were unequivocally positioned as key blameworthy subjects, portrayed as “incompetent fools, greedy, arrogant failures and mischievous children”, “fat cats...gamblers and criminals”, “pirates, pick pockets and cowboys” (ibid: 21, 98, 118). There was also strong public hostility towards bankers (Glover, 2008), centred on excessive recklessness and excessive reward (Froud et al, 2010b). The Prime Minister and regulators were positioned as guilty subjects in media discourse (Stanley, 2012) and the public blamed political elites for failing to prevent bankers’ behaviour (Glover, 2008). Media narratives and public perceptions made it necessary for Westminster to condemn bankers’ behaviour and commit to preventative measures if they wanted to maintain, or in some cases regain, credibility. However, Westminster’s narrative operated to deflect blame from neoliberalism.

Liberal Democrats presented the strongest condemnation of bankers' criticising their greed and arrogance. For Cable (in *Ask the Chancellors* 2010) there had to be less dependency on "a few prima donnas in financial speculation", and for Clegg (in First Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) "greedy bankers" held the country "hostage". Whilst the party recognised that bankers needed to have less power, its narrative did not contextualise greed in terms of neoliberalism, its promotion of consumerism, its knotting together of personal identity and consumption, and its commodification of money and labour. Nor did it contextualise it within neoliberalism's resolute prioritisation of profit accumulation and corporate externalisation of harm. Bankers' 'arrogance' was fundamentally a moral criticism and was *not* discussed in the context of the state's facilitation of finance's extraordinary power.

Paul Myners, (2010) the Financial Services Secretary, *explicitly* dislocated bankers' behaviour from neoliberal conditions:

"the failures have not been failures of the market economy. They have been failures of men and women who forgot that market discipline meant they had to be disciplined in order to get results out of the marketplace. Too many people got complacent and lazy – and the market responded as we should have predicted...the market did not fail. People failed. Like an overconfident swimmer caught in a rip tide, they disrespected the power of the market and were pulled out to sea".

Aligning with the neoliberal fundamentalist perspective, the calamity was apparently a market 'success'; it had responded, as it should to human indiscipline. In the early stages of the crisis popular narratives emphasised this greed of a "few 'bad apples'" (Thompson, 2009: 521). Newspapers listed individual financial and political elites to blame for the crisis (see Elliott, 2012; *TIME Magazine*, 2009). In 2009 the UK Treasury Select Committee hearings condemned the immorality of four elite bankers (Tombs, 2016a). Blame was also attributed more widely to 'the bankers' as a class (see Stanley, 2012; Tombs, 2016a). Blaming dysfunctional moral compasses for the crisis sought to protect neoliberalism and prevent expectations of major structural changes. "The message [was]...simple: if individual men and women have erred, this should not prevent the key engines of neoliberal capitalism from doing what they do best" (Tombs, 2016c: 34). The framing of the financial crisis as the consequence of a

few people's immoral compasses was a key strategy for rescuing definers' credibility and protecting the neoliberal project.

However, reflecting Westminster's 'finance friendly' approach, definers limited their vilification of bankers. Labour and Liberal Democrats attributed blame to *irresponsible* bankers and banks (see Labour, 2010; Liberal Democrats, 2010) and Conservatives attributed blame to an irresponsible Britain that included irresponsible banks and bankers. This constructed them as foolishly taking risks as opposed to intentionally committing harm either directly, or obliquely out of operating according to standard practices or out of personal greed and indifference to others. It excluded evidence that some bankers at least, had in fact intentionally, repeatedly, and systematically defrauded clients aware of the risks for their client but the reward for them (see Davies and McGoe, 2012). It disregarded that financial elites', in line with their 'expert' status, did, should, and could have reasonably foreseen that such practices would cause potentially disastrous instability (see Rajan, 2010). For Westminster definers, bankers were immorally *irresponsible*. They were, on this view acting out of ignorance, not malice or in accord with organisationally psychopathic motivation, and should not therefore be held *criminally responsible*. This evidences a continuation, and the dominance, of what Tombs (2016a: 65) called Gordon Brown's 2008 tone of "moral re-energisation" and not regulation or criminalisation.

Indeed by January 2011, bankers were making explicit calls for Britain to move on from banker blaming (see Werdigier, 2011). Most notably, Bob Diamond, CEO of Barclays, told a parliamentary committee that he believed "there was a period of remorse and apology for banks and...that period need[ed] to be over". As this thesis evidences, Westminster definers granted Diamond's wishes. Blame for crisis, and therefore the harshest responses, were directed away from financial elites and banks towards the neoliberal and neoconservative targets of the public sector and those at the opposite end of the class hierarchy. Even as early as GE10, Conservatives (2010a) construction of Britain as suffering from an "age of irresponsibility", directed blame to a wide range of 'causes' most notably Labour's public spending, 'broken families', and the 'workless'. Finance then, did not require a criminal investigation or a fundamental removal of power because many others and perhaps even everyone were

at fault. It just had to make its contribution to recovery, and the finance levy was constructed as an adequate means to ensure this (see Osborne, 2010a).

Over the crisis Westminster narration operated to shift concerns about bankers' behaviour and deregulation down the political agenda and selected framings ensured that 'causes' that had concomitant neoliberal responses were placed at the top of the agenda. To appear credible, it was unavoidable for Westminster to blame bankers. However, shifting attention away from neoliberal conditions and to ideologically advantageous 'causes' was from very early, key to preventing the crisis becoming a crisis *of* neoliberal capitalism.

Financial Reform: Relatively Radical Departures from, and Returns to, Neoliberal Theory

“The crisis produced a reform moment, one when the style of market government built up over the preceding decades was subjected to *potentially* seismic forces...The enforced extension of public ownership on a huge and rapid scale made it *impossible to avoid new questions about the banking industry*” (Froud et al, 2010b: 29, emphasis added).

Whilst definers sought to deflect blame from the neoliberal project including its key tenet of deregulation, media blaming and public awareness pressured definers to portray their respective parties as committed to financial reform in order to appear credible (see Cameron in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Labour, 2010). They made relatively radical claims about the position of finance and its regulation that departed from the neoliberal orthodoxy that had come to prevail in Britain. Westminster definers argued that the economy needed to be less dependent on finance and that manufacturing needed to take a central position (see Cable in Ask the Chancellors, 2010). There were calls for less dependence on debt and the financial industry, more savings and investment, rebuilding the manufacturing industry,

ensuring the financial industry lent to British manufacturers⁵⁷, investing in infrastructure, and developing more diverse forms of investment and industrial policies (see Cameron in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Clegg in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Labour, 2010; Osborne in The Chancellors' Debate, 2010).

Cameron (in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) stated Labour “hitch[ed] the whole fortunes of the economy to the City of London and we got into a situation where we ended up with the whole economy having to serve the banks rather than the other way around”. His critique recognised the power of finance to manipulate conditions to serve its interests. It detached finance's interests from public interests, departing from neoliberalism's usual rhetoric of trickle down and market self-regulation. Rather than a ‘free’ financial industry delivering optimum results, definers asserted that state intervention in finance was necessary to prevent it threatening (Labour, 2010), and “wreck[ing]” (Cameron in Hansard, 2010a) the economy as a whole. However, this radical impetus had a short lifespan, did not become a dominant frame of the crisis, and there was no radical departure from neoliberalism in the responses taken toward the financial industry. This suggests the claims were perfunctory or disingenuous; they were things that ‘had’ to be said as opposed to being reflections of true perceptions and intentions.

Predominantly, Westminster narration of responses to finance sought to exclude and delegitimise major changes and prevent a radical material departure. Whilst Liberal Democrats fully committed to a national financial levy, Conservatives and Labour invoked the well-rehearsed claims about the ‘importance’ of competition arguing the levy would have a detrimental effect on British business competitiveness and therefore the British public. Whilst Conservatives (2010) expressed a preference for a levy to be global, Brown (in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) asserted that he would *only* support a levy if it were global. Seemingly without considering permanent nationalisation, and with an absence of public debate, the three party leaders all

⁵⁷ Reinforcing the immorality of bankers, Clegg (in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) highlighted the consequences for British jobs as a result of RBS's funding of Kraft's takeover of Cadbury. He emphasised the need for banks to lend to *British* manufacturers to fund expansion and job creation, describing banks not lending as a “body without blood circulating”. This statement also reinforced the continued centrality of the financial industry to the economy.

insisted nationalised banks had to be re-privatised. Cameron (in Hansard, 2010b) asserted the private sector was “where they belong”, positioning it as their natural habitat. Re-privatisation was framed as being in the public interest. In response to an MP suggesting Conservatives would sell banks to “friends in the city”, Cameron (in Hansard, 2010b) asserted that he believed in “popular capitalism”. Despite the bailout translating into each household possessing £3000 worth of shares in RBS and Lloyds (see Froud et al, 2012), in the spirit of Thatcher, reprivatisation was framed as an opportunity for ‘ordinary people’ to become financial investors and entrepreneurs. Brown (in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) argued it would not only repay but also produce a profit for the taxpayer. Cameron was more reserved in his claims about public repayment than Labour. He argued that attaining the “maximum amount...for the taxpayer” had to be balanced against “a fully competitive banking system that serves business in this country” (Cameron in Hansard, 2010b). This laid the discursive foundations for Osborne’s narration of the sale of RBS shares at a loss in 2015.

To deflect attention from structural causes, Westminster definers constructed their response of a ring fence between investment banking and retail banking as protecting the public. A logic of difference, and a “moralistic dichotomy” (Tombs, 2016a: 57), was constructed that portrayed investment bankers as recklessly gambling the public’s money and retail bankers as sensible. For Clegg (in Second Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) “investment banking” was “high-risk, free-wheeling casino” style whereas “high street banking” was “conservative, sober”. There was an attempt to limit public perceptions of banks undertaking harmful actions to investment banking only and ignoring that retail banking also inflicted financial harms. This portrayed the ring fence as the response necessary to protect the public. Whilst the ‘investment’ banking sector’s speculation with other people’s money produced the public calamity, as Tombs (2013) recognises there has also been “systematic theft and fraud” in retail banking. The problems of both sectors being rooted in joint stock corporate structures, limited liability and banks being too big to fail, the omnipresence of fraud in finance, and consequently continued public vulnerability to banks’ actions, were left unexamined (Kay, 2015).

In sum, whilst Westminster definers made strong claims about challenging the power of finance, “in the UK there had been no thoroughgoing attempt to confront or

undermine the power of the financial services sector” and there has been no fundamentally industry-changing reform (Tombs, 2016a: 185). Rather, “more of the same poison was to prove the necessary cure” (ibid: 185). State responses to finance were marginal not fundamental (Harvey, 2012). As Tombs (2016a: 184) states, “one would not notice” that deregulation of finance was a key cause of the crisis “from state responses to it. As the crisis developed, the radical divergences from neoliberal theory and economic reality were not advanced. There has been an absence of “sustained, critical consideration of” the role state deregulation played in the crisis (ibid: 185). Lacklustre calls for the development of manufacturing and repositioning of finance were made but there was a lack of real commitment or change. The importance of business competitiveness and the need to restrain reforms for this purpose, already present in GE10, dominated debate and were used to legitimise the continuation of neoliberal conditions for finance and private capital more widely.

Private Capital to the Public’s Rescue

Somewhat ironically given that the crisis was caused by private capital and responses were continuing to serve private capital’s interests whilst placing the burden of sacrifices on the public, Westminster definers utilised ‘trickle down’ discourse to rationalise the continuation and intensification of business friendly conditions. Westminster definers argued that it was necessary for the government to maintain and implement ‘business friendly’ conditions so that the public could be saved from the perils of crisis. Responses in sectional interests were constructed as “*for all our sakes*” (Tombs, 2016a: 71, emphasis in original). With unbelievablechutzpah, the public were told private capital liberated by the state was not the cause of crisis but the ‘resolution’ to rationalise intensifying neoliberal conditions.

Using mythopoesis, definers stipulated that if Britain provided low tax and regulation, opened up markets, limited labour rights, and invested in infrastructure, business would provide employment, tax revenues, and growth.

“With the next Conservative government, our tax system...will help British firms out-compete their global rivals, not hold them back... Our competitiveness rating has fallen, while the burden of regulation and the impact of taxation have risen. We can only make a sustainable economic recovery if we send a clear signal that Britain

is open for business again. That means...lowering corporate tax rates, reducing the regulatory burden...” (Conservatives, 2010).

The corporate ‘offer’ was accompanied by a corporate threat to leave the country if ‘business friendly’ conditions were not delivered (Stiglitz, 2012). As Tombs and Hillyard (2004: 38) recognise, corporations hold “leverage over nation states” threatening re-domiciliation⁵⁸ if conditions are not sufficiently ‘business friendly’.

Despite the financial crisis being “in part-the result of a failure of regulation” (Tombs, 2016a: 76), and in contrast with Labour and Conservative’s claims to ‘manage’ finance to prevent it threatening and wrecking the economy, definers simultaneously called for further deregulation of the private sector. Rather than renewing regulation, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats criticised the ‘burden’ of ‘red tape’ and proposed that new elements of regulation must *replace* existing elements (see Conservatives, 2010; Liberal Democrats, 2010). “*Increasing* ‘freedom’ for capital was prescribed as the solution to the problems created in the first place by the excessive freedoms of capital” (Tombs, 2016a: 71). Also notwithstanding the private sector crisis, Conservatives (2010) proposed further private sector access to the public sector as part of the ‘resolution’. Whereas Labour (2010) expressed commitment to enforcing employment rights⁵⁹, Conservatives (2010), for their part expressed they were “proud of the last Conservative government’s industrial relations reforms, which helped bring about our economic revival in the 1980s, and...[would] always be prepared to build on them if necessary”.

Constructing private capital as the ‘saviour’ to crisis was used to exclude major *increases* in corporation tax from the agenda and actually legitimise cuts to the rate (see Osborne, 2010a, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2015a). In the same moment as constructing deficit and debt hysteria and inflicting austerity on the public, lower corporation taxes were framed as being in the public interest despite their implications for social justice. Whilst investment in public sector employment, health and welfare were unaffordable, definers committed to state investment in infrastructure in business

⁵⁸ Corporations threaten capital flight and the transfer of their production systems to other countries (Chomsky, 1999).

⁵⁹ This was despite their own actions undermining labour rights and contributing to the high levels of inequality that were a key cause of the financial crisis.

interests and therefore public interests (see Conservatives, 2010; Labour, 2010). Although as discussed in chapter two, this tends to be at the public's *expense*, both in terms of state spending and consumer costs.

Westminster's argument that Britain had to ensure 'friendly' conditions in order to compete with other nations for the gifts of private capital, supports Davies's (2016b: 6) argument that the state "comes to justify its decisions, policies and rules in terms that are commensurable with the logic of markets". In sum, discourses rationalised intensifying real crisis causing conditions and excluded alternative paths of state borrowing, investment and money creation for ordinary people. It ignored the evidence and that 'business friendly' conditions facilitate poor worker conditions, lower tax revenues, and foster crisis, connecting private and public interests to justify responses that are actually detrimental to the public.

Laying the Discursive Foundations for Austerity

To gain support, or acceptance, of austerity Westminster definers emphasised the severity of crisis and fuelled debt and "deficit hysteria" (Jessop, 2013: 252). The public were encouraged "to hate and fear the deficit" (Chomsky, 2010: 315). They used superlatives to stress its size and abnormality (see Darling in Ask the Chancellors 2010; Labour, 2010). Brown (in First Ministerial Debate 2010), for example, highlighted, "these are no ordinary times, and this is no ordinary election. We've just been going through the biggest global financial crisis in our lives". Definers communicated enormous proportions of the "seismic" crisis (see Labour, 2010), for example Brown (in Labour, 2010) characterised it as an earthquake. Osborne asserted that it was necessary to protect UK credibility and give the financial markets confidence in Britain to protect reasonable interest rates for borrowing (Gamble, 2015). They emphasised uncertainty, urgency and 'peril' by repeatedly referencing the immediacy of threat (see Brown, 2010a; Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010). Although there were occasional dissenting views, in the media voices "warning of the danger of the deficit were much more heavily featured and directly endorsed" (Berry, 2015: 12). Newspaper reporting was "characterised by fear appeals, the presentation of misleading data and false comparisons", "apocalyptic language", "substantial disinformation and incorrect accounts of the UK's fiscal position" (ibid:

1, 10, 15). Westminster definers, supported by the mainstream media, sought to create, in Agamben's (2005: 1) terminology a "state of exception" to justify exceptional responses.

Misleading comparisons and inaccurate accounts of the UK's fiscal position were prominent Conservative strategies for generating hysteria and therefore acceptance of austerity. Whilst it was claimed Britain's debt was high, by historic standards in 2010 it was low, even lower than when Labour were elected in 1997 (Gamble, 2015). To emphasise the size of the deficit Cameron (in First Ministerial Debate 2010) made international comparisons. Gordon Brown, he argued, had "given this country the biggest budget deficit of any developed country in the world". These comparisons invoked fear about 'our' country being in the worst financial position and acceptance of the need to repair 'our' nation to improve its international standing. Cameron (in Second Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; in Final Prime Ministerial Debate 2010) misleadingly framed the UK as in a similar position to Greece. As Greece had been positioned as 'bad' in the dichotomy of good surplus and bad deficit countries of the Eurozone (see Harvey, 2011; Spannos, 2014) and had been constructed as the epitome of national fiscal irresponsibility⁶⁰, the comparison sought to generate anxiety. Whilst Britain had debt as a proportion of GDP that was higher than a number of Eurozone countries, the comparison ignored a several important differences, specifically the powers that the UK had that Eurozone countries did not (Gamble, 2015). In countries that have their own central bank, governments have much greater control over their fiscal policies. Crucially, "the UK still had the ability to let sterling depreciate", reduce interest rates, and could repeatedly engage in quantitative easing (ibid: 46). "The British government could still borrow on very favourable rates in international financial markets. Its credit rating was high, and the debt was funded through long-term dated bonds, which meant the interest rates were locked in". In contrast, "Eurozone debtor states" had "much of their debt...in short term bonds. When the loans needed extending, the markets kept demanding higher rates of interest" (ibid: 47). "Although Britain's financial situation was stable in 2010", it was in the

⁶⁰ Elite definers and the media across various nations subjected Greece to disproportionate critique (Antoniades, 2012). It was constructed as the "(corrupted) other" and used as a "negative reference point" (ibid: 12). For example, the New York Times suggested tax evasion was a "national pastime" (ibid: 14).

Conservatives and the neoliberal project's interests to claim otherwise and to try and reclaim the title as the party of economic competence (ibid: 47). Major differences between the UK and Greek case were disingenuously ignored.

Conservatives also claimed the country had “run out of money” (see Cameron in Hansard, 2010a); Osborne (in The Chancellors' Debate, 2010), it had met its borrowing and spending limits, and therefore austerity was necessary. This supports Davies's (2016b: 7) argument that politicians draw upon “the authority of economics...to dictate legitimate courses of action”. This falsehood was presented as ‘an economic fact’. Yet, the UK had the freedom to increase the money supply to generate demand and tackle recession or to redistribute wealth and reduce the inequality that underlay low growth (see Wren-Lewis, 2015). Inflation was not near problematic levels and at that moment encouraging demand and inflation to rise would have been a more logical response.

In sum, Conservatives constructed the ‘extraordinary’ UK debt and deficit as a very dangerous threat to Britain's credit rating (Conservatives, 2010), investor confidence, and potentially calamitous for growth and employment (Blyth, 2013a; Wolf, 2010; Krugman, 2010a). Misleading comparisons, inaccurate claims, and exclusions of evidence and information were key to generating fear that the UK was in peril and had to urgently implement major a response. Excluding corporate tax rises from the agenda, portraying the debt and deficit as threateningly high, and asserting the UK could not borrow tax or spend positioned austerity as unavoidable. Conservatives (2010) announcement of their plans for “an emergency budget” to eradicate the deficit reinforced the urgency of a dramatic response to deal with the threat of disaster and the budget cemented Conservatives commitment to austerity.

Framing Austerity as a Rational and Necessary Response

When a capitalist crisis strikes the current government is likely to be discredited⁶¹ (Gamble, 2009), particularly if they have been in government for a while (‘t Hart and Tindall, 2009). A recently elected party may more easily be able to claim that the

⁶¹ In Iceland in response to the financial crisis there were public protests calling for Prime Minister Geir Haarde's resignation that Haarde adhered to (Gamble, 2009).

‘mess’ is not their doing but they can ‘clean it up’ (ibid). Conservatives presented a powerful discourse attributing blame for the ‘threatening’ debt and deficit to the ideologically advantageous ‘cause’ of Labour’s irresponsible public spending (see Conservatives, 2010). Public deficit and debt significantly increased as a result of bank bailouts and the economic damage the crisis brought (see Gamble, 2015; Rogers, 2009; Scruton, 2010). However, “government debt [was] re-cast as state over-spending rather than the socialisation of the effects of...capitalist profit taking” (Tombs, 2016c: 39). The “dominant image of its locus...moved” the crisis from the private to the public sector” shifting focus to public spending (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 300).

Conservatives ignored the real causes of debt and deficit and the fact that “the UK had entered the 2008 recession with an internationally and historically low public debt burden” (Berry, 2010: 10) and portrayed public spending as being the cause rather than consequence of financial crisis. Despite Conservatives playing a key role in supporting neoliberal conditions, and committing to Labour’s level of public spending before the financial crisis, they then blamed the crisis on Labour and presented the election of Conservatives as the route to crisis ‘resolution’.

Conservatives engaged in explicit attachment of Labour and economic problems to attribute blame and responsibility to the party and frame Conservatives’ desired responses as rational. They repeatedly made reference to “Labour’s debt crisis”, stated “Gordon Brown’s debt, waste and taxes” had “wrecked the economy” and the deficit was labelled “Gordon Brown’s legacy” (see Conservatives, 2010). Their campaign posters featured an image of Brown laughing with statements such as: “I doubled the national debt vote for me” (see Guardian, 2010). This was reinforced with wider critiques of Labour’s economic competence and credibility. Cameron (in Hansard, 2010a) stated, “they told us they had abolished boom and bust but they gave us the longest and deepest recession on record”. He highlighted that Labour commended Fred Goodwin, who caused serious damage in the economy (Cameron in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010).

Crucially, blaming public spending served a greater purpose than discrediting Labour. Conservatives could have blamed Labour’s deregulation of finance if discrediting them was their only purpose. However, they avoided blaming and critiquing neoliberal

principles, blamed Labour and attacked neoliberal targets including public spending and specifically the welfare state. This allowed them to frame responses that did not address a real cause but actually intensified it as logical. Cuts to welfare benefits could be framed as a ‘resolution’ for a crisis where austerity perpetuated it. They directed blame away from the neoliberal project and set the foundation for its re-intensification, as ‘resolution’.

A logic of equivalence was constructed between Labour and fiscal recklessness, borrowing, and over-spending. In the aftermath of the election Cameron (in Hansard, 2010a), referring to Liam Byrne’s (the Chief Secretary to the Treasury under Brown’s government) note⁶², stated “thirteen words that sum up thirteen years of complete cavalier arrogance with the taxpayers’ money”. He continued “it stops now—no more spending beyond our means, no more reckless borrowing”. Drawing upon public anger at elite excess, they argued that ‘fiscally reckless Labour’ had *wasted* public money, particularly on excess and bureaucracy providing examples of MPs spending on taxis, stationery, and meals (see Cameron in First Ministerial Debate 2010; Cameron in Hansard, 2010a; Cameron in Second Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Cameron, 2010a; Conservatives, 2010). Conservatives also argued that high spending does not necessarily deliver better outcomes (see Cameron in First Ministerial Debate, 2010) and reiterated the neoliberal rhetoric of the need of public sector reforms to attain *value for money* (see Conservatives, 2010).

In contrast, Conservatives (2010a) constructed a logic of equivalence between their own party, fiscal responsibility, and limited public spending. They claimed Labour offered “big government”, “big spending” and “recklessness”, whereas Conservatives offered “good government”, “good housekeeping” and “responsibility” (see Cameron in Hansard, 2010a). Liberal Democrats supported Conservative linking of austerity and fiscal discipline, and attacked Labour ‘borrow and spend’ and fiscal indiscipline (see Cable in The Chancellors’ Debate, 2010; Liberal Democrats, 2010). The logic of equivalences formed a logic of difference that constructed the parties’ approaches as fundamentally distinct and constructed Labour’s approach as the problem and the

⁶² The infamous note stated, “Dear Chief Secretary, I’m afraid to tell you that there’s no money left”.

Conservatives approach as the solution. This was a strategy for obscuring the fact that *both* major parties supported the neoliberal project and that a deepening of the very conditions that caused the crisis was being framed as the solution. The logic of equivalence between fiscal responsibility and austerity, repeated consistently by Conservatives throughout the narration of crisis was key to framing austerity as the necessary response. As Davies, (2016a: 122) states, “no amount of empirical evidence of austerity’s failings seems adequate to derail those who pronounce its necessity”.

Whilst Labour attempted to defend their level of public spending, arguing that they had responsibly used the strength of the economy to fund publicly valued projects (see Labour, 2010; Brown, 2010b), they failed to present a powerful challenge to Conservative’s accusatory discourse and crucially they did not truly contest the response of austerity. Whilst Brown was reluctant to support cuts, Darling, his Chancellor, argued their necessity (Gamble, 2015). Labour could have presented a narrative that blamed neoliberalism and advocated a radical change, perhaps a return to Keynesianism. However, they too supported austerity even though they did not blame public spending for the crisis. Anxious to rebuild its economic ‘credibility’ given Conservatives had constructed austerity as common sense, or because they desired to exploit the crisis to deepen neoliberalism, or because they lacked an alternative plan, Labour failed to confront the crisis for what it was, a neoliberal failure, and supported the necessity of austerity. Thus *elite consensus* was that austerity was necessary (Clarke, 2010a; Froud et al, 2010a; Levitas, 2012).

Alternatives became excluded from definers’ discourses across the mainstream spectrum (Albo and Evans, 2010; Allen, 2012). The public were told there was no alternative (Radice, 2010). Within newspaper debates there was an “almost complete lack of any left-wing or even Keynesian alternatives to the neoliberal consensus” (Berry, 2015: 8). ‘There is no alternative’ acted as what Davies (2016a: 133) terms a “performative utterance”, seeking to “preserve the status quo and to occupy the discursive space that might otherwise be filled by empirical or critical questions about the nature of reality”. The insistence of the necessity of austerity, the exclusion of alternatives and their merits, and crucially the absence of a powerful oppositional movement challenging this consensus, ensured that austerity dominated the agenda.

Austerity then, despite the evidence, came to be presented as a necessary ‘technical’ ‘solution’ to economic problems as opposed to a political ‘solution’ (Allen, 2012). Also in attempt to obscure the ideological basis for making the choice and position it firmly as common sense Clegg (in First Ministerial Debate, 2010) declared “we all know we’ve got this great black hole in our public finances. That’s obvious. We all know we’re going to have to save money; we all know we’re going to have to make cuts”. Cuts were referred to as tough choices and difficult decisions (see Cameron, 2010b, c; Darling in The Chancellors’ Debate, 2010), as undesirable but unfortunately unavoidable.

In summary, a crisis caused by “finance capital and capitalist speculation” was powerfully framed (without challenge) as a crisis caused by “state over-spending” (Tombs, 2016a: 69). The passing of blame from the private sector and its debt to the public sector and *its* debt was key to legitimising austerity (ibid). Emphasis on severity, misleading comparisons, and inaccurate statements, including those for blame attribution, and the exclusion of information and evidence framed the crisis in a way that supported neoliberal responses and excluded anti-neoliberal responses. As a consequence of the successful framing:

“the ease with which...politicians...attacked civil servants and the social benefits that have been the birth right of UK citizens since the Second World War contrast[ed] markedly with an almost non-existent approach...to financial sector reform” (Simms and Greenham, 2010: 53).

Conservative blaming of Labour’s public spending was used to legitimise years of cuts that rolled back post-WW2 working class gains, deepening inequality, and protecting the freedoms the financial industry had been granted by neoliberalism. This blame attribution discourse was fundamental to rationalising the unjust response.

Debating Variations of Neoliberal ‘Resolutions’

Westminster definers presented a consensus around neoliberal ‘resolution’ and narrated the crisis within narrow boundaries of the political spectrum sharing concerns for the interests of capital. In contrast to the UK’s claim to be a ‘liberal democracy’ providing real debate, transparency, and real choice, for McChesney (1999: 9) under neoliberalism there has been “trivial debate over minor issues by parties that basically pursue the same pro-business policies”. However, whilst limiting debate, definers

sought to construct a façade of real debate and choice. This thesis provides further evidence supporting Noam Chomsky's (2002: 43) assertion that:

“the smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum – even encourage the more critical and dissident views. That gives people the sense that there's free thinking going on, while all the time the prepositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of debate!”

Ideologically unified elites do not necessarily produce the same narrative rather there is difference *within boundaries* (Coleman et al, 2009: 64; Hall et al, 1978). Also whilst ideologies are *shared* mental frameworks they comprise various strands, and individuals' views may differ within boundaries (Geoghegan, 1996; Stafford, 1998).

Elite consensus “close(s) down space for rational debate about alternatives” (Shorthose, 2011: 110) and an absence of challenges facilitates the consensus. Limited debates can “cripple our imaginations” (Giroux, 2014: 24); they seek to prevent awareness of alternatives and imagining outside boundaries. They can act as a “straitjacket” restricting ideas, language and behaviour (Massey, 2013: 13). For Giroux (2014: 27), “the disimagination machine”, operated by elites and the ideological state apparatus:

“functions primarily to short-circuit the ability of individuals to think critically, imagine the unimaginable, and engage in thoughtful and critical dialogue, or put simply, to become critically engaged citizens of the world”.

Given that Westminster plays a key role in influencing public sense-making in Femia's (1987: 44) terminology Westminster narration may have acted as a “barrier” to “alternative images of society”, restraining, “mental horizons” (45).

Once they had established the necessity of austerity, Westminster elites debated *its timing* (Wolf, 2010) and whether tax changes should form part of deficit reduction. Labour and Conservatives narrowed the debate to the comparatively minor difference of whether austerity should begin in 2010 or 2011. They competed against each other to construct their response as leading to a good ending, arguing their respective party's *timing* would deliver ‘resolution’ and the ‘oppositions’ would risk/ forfeit recovery.

This intended to give the perception of real debate and choice and obscure ideological consensus. They presented a lively debate but fundamentally the spectrum was limited.

In line with their construction that the nation faced immediate threat from deficit, and in support of a neoliberal preference for a tight budget and low tax, Conservatives advocated immediate cuts to public sector pay, increases in retirement ages (essentially cutting future pension packages), and avoidance of tax rises (see Cameron in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Conservatives, 2010; Osborne in The Chancellors' Debate, 2010; Osborne in Ask the Chancellors, 2010). They argued that Labour's approach, which to date had involved increased leveraging to support the economy, was ineffective in delivering sustainable resolution and gave particular focus to relatively high unemployment (see Conservatives, 2010a; Osborne in The Chancellors' Debate, 2010; Cable in The Chancellors' Debate, 2010). They claimed Labour's 'jobs tax'⁶³ would increase unemployment framing it as further evidence of Labour's economic incompetence. Cameron (in Hansard, 2010a) promised to "stop one of the most stupid, reckless and irresponsible tax rises ever dreamt up in the middle of a recession", he stated "if you put a tax on jobs, that I think is a jobs killer, it is a recovery killer, it's an economy killer" (Cameron in First Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010). Conservatives also presented a moral critique of the tax, arguing it would contravene meritocratic principles by punishing 'hard-workers' (see Cameron in First Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Cameron in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Osborne in The Chancellors' Debate, 2010; Osborne in Ask the Chancellors, 2010).

Labour argued it was necessary for the state to continue to spend in the "defining year" of 2010-2011 (see Brown in First Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010), to support the economy and deliver recovery (see Darling in The Chancellors' Debate, 2010). However, from 2011 the economy would be stable enough to cut public spending and increase taxes (see Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Darling in The Chancellors' Debate, 2010).

"From the autumn of 2008, big calls had to be made. We nationalised Northern Rock, protected people's savings, cut VAT to stimulate our economy, put in place job guarantees to get people

⁶³ Brown (in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) proposed the increase in national insurance would be used to contribute to funding police, health services, and education.

back to work, and stepped in to stop repossessions. It is working. The banking system has been stabilised. Our economy is showing signs of returning to growth...The question at this election is whether people think the choice we made was the right one and whether we use the power of government to help sustain recovery” (Labour, 2010).

Notwithstanding their recognition that state spending supports an economy in crisis, Labour did not advocate the continuation of fiscal stimulus beyond 2011 or even discuss its merits.

Labour claimed that Conservatives’ *immediate* cuts and withdrawal of state support of the economy at a critical moment would risk economic depression⁶⁴ (Albo and Evans, 2010; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). They committed to offering protection of social achievements, jobs and living standards, and framed Conservatives as making a political choice to risk them by advocating immediate austerity (see Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Brown, 2010c). Labour constructed a logic of difference between their party and Conservatives, but the purpose of theirs was to construct Conservatives’ austerity plan as ideological and Labour’s austerity plan as limited to the ‘necessary’ (see Brown in Second Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010). Labour’s message was their austerity was lighter and friendlier and whilst unfortunately there was no alternative to cutting public spending they would protect social justice measures where possible.

Liberal Democrats (2010) stated they would “base the timing of cuts on an objective assessment of economic conditions, not political dogma” framing the other parties’ plans as political. Clegg (in First Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) supported Labour’s construction of Conservatives’ austerity plan as ideological by criticising Conservatives for proposing to cut inheritance tax, serving the rich, whilst cutting public sector spending, harming the poor. Liberal Democrats committed to ensuring the wealthiest pay their taxes to allow ‘the ordinary’ and the poorest to have lower taxes (see Liberal Democrats, 2010). They repeatedly used an example of a banker and cleaner, which harnessed public hostility towards bankers’ excess and arrogance and presented the party as on the side of the ‘ordinary worker’:

⁶⁴ For an example see Brown (in First Ministerial Debate 2010).

“we would, for instance, stop this grotesque spectacle of this unfair tax system...where right now, a greedy banker in the City of London pays a lower rate of tax on their capital gains than their cleaner does on their wages” (Clegg in First Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010).

Cameron’s response to Liberal Democrats tax proposals supported the latter’s construction of Conservatives as being led by the interests of the wealthy when determining their responses to crisis. Cameron (in First Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) stated that whilst tax cuts for the poorest were desirable they were unaffordable (even though he had determined inheritance tax and lower corporate tax as affordable); “I would love to take everyone out of their first £10,000 of income tax, Nick. It’s a beautiful idea, a lovely idea. We cannot afford it”. He sought to prevent his tax policies appearing political by claiming he *could not* choose reductions for low earners. In conflict Liberal Democrats argued that they were affordable if the tax system was “switch[ed]” to support ‘ordinary workers’ rather than the wealthy (Clegg in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010), by ending loopholes and reforming non-domiciled status (see Clegg in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Liberal Democrats, 2010). Notably, when seeking to form a Coalition with the Liberal Democrats, Cameron (2010a) committed to *finding a way* to making them affordable. Here, whilst there was consensus around austerity there was a struggle over which end of the class spectrum tax policies should serve. When in a coalition Conservatives and Liberal Democrats increased the tax-free allowance and cut corporation tax and inheritance tax whilst inflicting austerity. The Liberal Democrats pressured Conservatives into a tax policy that helped workers but it did not negate the economic harms inflicted on them by the Coalition.

In sum, the public had to choose between three parties advocating austerity as the path to ‘resolution’. Whilst there was variation over tax policies, there was unity over the necessity of austerity and the greatest point of variation was whether cuts should begin in 2010 or 2011. Whilst Conservatives argued for immediate cuts Labour was marginally different effectively saying, “yes, we will cut too, only not so much, not so fast, not so soon and not all at once” (Hall, 2011: 724). The debate contributed to the façade of real debate and sought to obscure the reality that parties were ideologically unified. An absence of a powerful oppositional movement advocating an alternative facilitated Westminster elites’ restraint of debate and the enactment of a *neoliberal* ‘resolution’ to a *neoliberal* crisis.

Framing Responses as Mechanisms for Fairness and Equality

A key strategy for legitimising responses is framing them as informed by shared values (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). Constructing responses as fair and just frame them as necessary for society to be moral (ibid). After WW2 Labour called for movement towards equality and social justice, a commitment enacted in their creation of the welfare benefits system, the NHS, and the support of workers' rights. Labour's (2009) millennium constitution also stated that its "principles and objectives" are "equality, social and economic justice, community solidarity and freedom". As discussed in chapter two, for New Labour, social justice no longer entailed equality rather the emphasis was on *fairness*. In GE10 Labour committed to fairness. Its manifesto was titled "a fair future for all". 'Fairness' was invoked throughout to justify advocated responses. In contrast, however equality was used only in reference to the Equality Act and the role of trade unions. Fairness was used conservatively to argue that rewards could not come without responsibility, welfare cuts were necessary, and all needed to pay their share for the recovery. Fairness used this way supports individual responsibilisation whereas the value of social justice engenders collectivism. Labour's shift to the moral value of 'fairness' reflects the change in the responses they were seeking to legitimise and the party's ideological shift. The moral value of equality was used to argue for the creation and development of the welfare state but the moral value of fairness was used to legitimise its rollback.

Conservatives and Liberal Democrats recognised high levels of inequality and unfairness. For Liberal Democrats (2010) "Britain, for all its many strengths, is still too unequal and unfair, a country where the circumstances of your birth and the income of your parents still profoundly affect your chances in life". Cameron (in Hansard, 2010a) complained, "after 13 years of a Labour government inequality is wider, social mobility has stalled, severe poverty is rising and social justice is falling. Liberal Democrats (2010) presented further relatively progressive arguments stating "greed and self-interest have held sway over the government and parts of the economy in recent decades. They have forgotten that growth must be shared and sustainable if it is to last";

“at the root of Britain’s problems today is the failure to distribute power fairly between people. Politicians and civil servants have hoarded political power; economic power has been hoarded by big businesses. Both kinds of power have been stripped from ordinary citizens, leaving us with a fragile society marked by inequality, environmental degradation and boom bust economics” (ibid).

Promises were made to share prosperity and develop social mobility to address inequality (see Conservatives, 2010). The coalition government’s material actions suggest they were disingenuous. Both parties were committed to austerity and for the following five years implemented an economic approach that increased inequality and reduced social mobility (see Stewart and Lupton, 2015) unfairly placing the greatest burden on the poorest (see Lupton et al, 2015). The distance between suggestions that inequality and injustice would be addressed and the actions that were taken in government, suggest the discursive claims were examples of what Mathiesen (2004: 9) terms “absorption” whereby powerful definers draw progressive messages into their narrative to achieve acquiescence.

Clegg (in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) recognised that cuts needed to *appear* fair to be accepted:

“people aren't going to accept these difficult decisions unless we do it fairly...If you don't have fairness at the heart of everything we do, it's going to be very, very difficult to see us through these difficult decisions in the years to come”.

He made several explicit references to maintaining consent when implementing responses. It was important that “people feel that whilst difficult decisions are being made, at least the tax system is on their side” (Clegg in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010). Clegg (2010) also argued that bankers’ bonus reforms were necessary for quelling public “despair at the greed and excess” and healing the public’s perception of finance. Claiming to uphold the moral value of fairness and framing responses as fair were key strategies for justifying neoliberal ‘resolution’.

Broken Britain: Justifying the Targeting of the Welfare State

Conservatives constructed Britain as trapped in a myriad of crises and spiral of decline repeatedly referring to the economic crisis alongside a political crisis and a series of social crises. Some constructions of crisis were more truthful than others.

“Our national finances are mired in massive debt. Millions are living the misery of unemployment. Communities are shattered by crime and abuse. People in the public services are trapped in a web of rules and regulations. People have lost faith that politics can fix our problems, or that politicians can lead us into a better future. There is a feeling of helplessness. Once again, there is a mood afoot that the decline of Britain is inevitable” (Conservatives, 2010).

A key Conservative construction was ‘Broken Britain’⁶⁵, a dependent and irresponsible society lacking discipline and individual responsibility because the government allowed it to (Hancock et al, 2012). However, bankers and politicians were not the target of the moral panic here. Rather, blame was directed down the class hierarchy towards neo-conservative folk devils or neoliberal targets. Burglars, youths, ‘broken families’, and ‘the workless’ were constructed as threatening ‘ordinary people’s’ lives. Key folk devils were quickly identified: workless welfare claimants, “shifty, feckless, irresponsible, bad (and single) parents, with disorganised lives” (Hall, 2011: 721).

In the 1970s “the law and order campaign groomed the society for the extensive exercise of the repressive side of the state” (Hall et al, 2013 [1978]: 273). Similarly, ‘Broken Britain’ manipulated society into perceiving Britain as suffering a crisis of irresponsibility to legitimise “moral authoritarianism” (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 311). The problem came to be “dependency-inducing statism and welfarism” (ibid: 310).

“We need to put everything we do through a simple test: if it encourages irresponsibility, we shouldn’t do it, if it encourages responsibility we should. We should remember that basic rule that when you give people responsibility they behave responsibly. So instead of governments undermining families with a benefits system that pays couples to live apart lets use government to help bring people together...Instead of allowing people to choose a life on benefits when they could work, say to people if you can work and turn down work, you will not go on getting your benefits...we have got to end this culture of entitlement and build a new culture of responsibility” (Cameron, 2010b).

⁶⁵ Labour supported elements of the construction. It refuted Conservatives construction of ‘Broken Britain’. However, it argued that responses needed to ensure greater individual responsibility (see Brown, 2010b; Brown in First Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Labour, 2010).

In 2011 the Broken Britain discourse was used to frame the ‘riots’. Rather than explaining the uprising through discourses of poverty, social injustice, and discriminatory policing Cameron (2011) spoke of a:

“slow-motion moral collapse that has taken place in parts of our country these past few generations? Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequences. Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort. Crime without punishment. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without control. Some of the worst aspects of human nature tolerated, indulged - sometimes even incentivised - by a state and its agencies that in parts have become literally de-moralised”.

They were caused by “‘pure’ or ‘sheer’ criminality and needed to be met by the full force of the law” (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 310). In accordance with neo-conservative values, marriage, school discipline, work, and a small welfare state were constructed as solutions to Britain’s decline (Slater, 2012), as opposed to a responsible and disentitled financial sector or policies for social justice.

Exceptionally punitive responses to the ‘immoral threat’ appeared. Conservatives (2010) asserted that they would be “*cracking down*” on burglars to address the threat and “mend our broken society” in the interests of “responsible citizens”. Teachers would have “tough new powers of discipline” to ensure order (ibid). Irresponsible parents and their ‘broken families’⁶⁶, causing crime and high public spending, would be penalised rather than rewarded with changes to the tax and benefit systems (ibid). This was repetition of a strategy used in narration of the 1970s capitalist crisis. Hall et al’s (1978: 148) state that “fears and panics about the breakdown of social discipline...centre[d] on the indiscipline of ‘youth’, ‘the young’ and on those institutions whose task is to help them internalise social discipline – the school, but above all, the family”.

⁶⁶ The ‘problem’ of ‘family breakdown’ was communicated through discourses about ‘dysfunctional’ families, ‘troubled families’, the plight of teenage pregnancies, and ‘dadlessness’ (Slater, 2011). Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, stated that poor families should not be given money because “feckless parents will spend it on drugs and gambling” (ibid). Cameron wrote in the Sunday Telegraph that British society should stigmatise and shame ‘AWOL’ dads like “drink drivers” (ibid). The public were told children without male role models would grow up to be *criminal or welfare dependent* (ibid). MP and senior Conservative figure, Chris Grayling (cited in Hancock et al, 2012: 349-350), referred to the problem of “Jeremy Kyle generation”, young and poor “failed families” with absent and criminal fathers.

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) gave ‘credibility’ to the ‘Broken Britain’ construction. The think tank identified five pathways to poverty: family breakdown, worklessness and dependency, educational failure, serious personal debt, and addiction (Silver et al, 2014). Poverty and morality became entangled (Hancock et al, 2012). Its findings aided Conservatives in generating a moral panic, with “the ultimate pariah” being the young single mother dependent upon benefits (Silver et al, 2014) and assisted Conservatives in promoting welfare reform and manufacturing ignorance of alternatives to austerity (Slater, 2012). The mass media largely uncritically drew on CSJ reports, contributing to moral panic⁶⁷ (Silver et al, 2014). They shamed the ‘undisciplined’ and ‘incompetent’ poor and presented the welfare state as causing worklessness (Clarke, 2010b; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Wiggan, 2012), which was constructed as generational; it was claimed people were ‘trapped’ in ‘dependency’ (Slater, 2012; Wiggan, 2012).

There is evidence to suggest the construction of ‘Broken Britain’ was at best misleading. Shildrick et al (2012) and MacDonald et al (2014) found no evidence to support the argument that generational worklessness and irresponsible dependency were problems. Rather, two generations of extensive worklessness was rare, and moreover unemployment was not a choice. They discovered the lived experiences of insecurity and precariousness in a period of high unemployment, low paid and temporary work. In support of Davies’s (2016a) argument that the current phase of neoliberalism does not seek empirical evidence to inform its approaches, Slater (2011) suggests that ‘evidence-based decision making’ by think tanks has been “tailored to the needs of... elites”. Research has been “rigged” to produce data that supports neoliberal dogma and perpetuates social inequality (ibid).

For neoliberals, the welfare state’s “utopian sentimentality enervated the nation’s moral fibre, eroded personal responsibility and undermined the over-riding duty of the poor to work” (Hall, 2011: 707). Conservatives blamed Labour’s ‘big state’ approach for an absence of competition and meritocracy shielding the ‘undeserving’ from appropriate consequences and therefore encouraging immoral behaviour (see Cameron

⁶⁷ For examples see Chapman (2009) and Doughty (2013).

in Hansard, 2010a). The system was framed as working in reverse: the ‘undeserving workless’ were being rewarded with privileges not granted to the ‘hard-working’ majority, directing blame downwards (see Cameron in First Ministerial Debate, 2010; Cameron in Second Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Cameron in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010). As a consequence of an absence of meritocracy, rising worklessness and welfare dependence were threatening Britain (see Osborne in The Chancellors’ Debate, 2010). Conservatives (2010) blamed poverty, in particular child poverty, on worklessness failing to recognise in-work poverty⁶⁸. The ‘threat’ was workshy parents *choosing* not to work (see Cameron in First Ministerial Debate, 2010). A lack of hard work was the reason the poor were poor (Littler, 2013; Silver et al, 2014). Poverty was positioned as the outcome of an individual’s immorality as opposed to being structurally generated; in C Wright Mills’ (2000 [1959]: 8) terminology “public issues” were constructed as “personal troubles”. Again, responsibility was deflected from neoliberal conditions.

In this way, a moralistic dichotomy was established between the discursive figures of the ‘hard-working taxpayer’ and that of the welfare benefit claimant. The former was constructed as the example of British morality and the latter as defying the moral values of Britain. A notable contribution to this depiction came in 2011 with Clegg’s (2011) “alarm clock Britain” which emphasised the importance of people who “get up every morning” and undertake “hard graft” for their country rather than relying “on state hand-outs”. The moral were hard-working, responsible, self-sacrificing, and patriotic. The dichotomy constructed them as morally distinct groups excluding complexities, and inaccurately and misleadingly simplifying conditions.

‘The ordinary’ were constructed as working not only to support themselves but the workless too, framing ‘us’ as victims of exploitation by the ‘immoral other’. Constructions of the welfare state as there for ‘all of us’ if ‘economic conditions turned against ‘us’ were replaced with constructions that it were a vehicle for ‘them’ to exploit ‘us’, eroding collectivism in favour of individualism. Drawing upon Quinney (1972:

⁶⁸ In 2011-2012 “around 6.7 million people, over half of all those in poverty, lived in a family with at least one adult who was working” (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013). Figures released in December 2016 showed “7.4 million people, including 2.6 million children are in poverty despite being in a working family...a record high of 55 per cent of people in poverty are in working households” (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016).

316), the victim was “held up” by the powerful to legitimise neoliberal responses, most notably the rolling back of the welfare state. Cuts became ‘necessary’ to discipline and responsabilise immoral individuals in the interests of the rest of ‘us’. This was a clear example of victim blaming. The case for the economic ‘necessity’ of austerity was to be reinforced by a systematic proclamation of its moral necessity.

Once the immorality of the *voluntarily workless* and perception of undeserved state support was established, Cameron (in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) asserted that this group should be primary targets of cuts. For Conservatives, the remedy for the social ill of worklessness was ‘tough but fair’ welfare changes to re-moralise the individual and responsabilise and discipline through the re-establishment of a ‘meritocracy’. Westminster definers advocated a more coercive welfare state: conditionality would increase, work would be incentivised and those still unmotivated to work would be forced to engage in work schemes, or face sanctioning (see Brown, 2010b; Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Cameron, 2010b; Cameron in First Ministerial Debate, 2010; Clegg in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Conservatives, 2010). Echoing Thatcher, emphasis was placed on responsibility in exchange for rights (see Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Labour, 2010). Conservatives (2010) framed their welfare benefit proposals for the unemployed as “a hand up, not a hand out” ensuring *responsibility* not *dependency*. Those who did not work or develop their employability to *earn* their benefits were punished for their immorality, a marked difference from benefits being a right to those who could not work because of circumstances outside of their control and therefore responsibility.

Conservatives (2010) and Labour (2010) made commitments to stringent checks of Employment and Support Allowance claimants. Private companies would be paid by results to identify those *unwilling* to work and *cheating* the system (Conservatives, 2010). This, as well as pressures to achieve targets in job centres, motivated unethical decisions that inflicted severe personal harm (see O’Hara, 2015). It also reinforced the construction of welfare claimants as morally distinct, immorally exploiting ‘us’ and not to be trusted. An absence of a powerful oppositional movement facilitated the campaign against welfare claimants and the passing of the burden of crisis onto them.

On their parts, Labour and Liberal Democrats framed welfare cuts as for the benefit of claimants themselves, arguing they would develop their “self-respect” (Clegg in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) and “self-esteem” (Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010). This framed *not rolling back welfare* as *immoral* because unconditional welfare encouraged dependency (see Clegg in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Labour, 2010). Labour (2010) framed withdrawing incapacity benefit for people with disabilities and health conditions through “tough but fair” tests as helping them live independently and with dignity. This reinforced the message that being dependent even when ill or disabled is undignified in the neoliberal world.

Despite “the hard edge of cuts, work-fare and the gospel of self-reliance” Conservatives tried to construct themselves as providing “Compassionate Conservatism” (Hall, 2011: 710). As recognised earlier, they claimed to be concerned with tackling inequality and poverty, but rather than calling for a change in structural conditions, they argued that the solution was coerced work and withdrawing immoral individuals’ protections from the consequences of their actions (see Cameron, 2010b). This was a resolutely neoliberal approach used to erode compassion towards the vulnerable. In GE15, despite five years of coalition policies harming the vulnerable (to the extent that downward trends in mortality were reversed) Cameron (2015a) re-stated the claim that he was a “compassionate Conservative”. He evidenced his commitment to a growing economy, the benefits of which were apparently trickling down.

In sum, Conservatives constructed a crisis of law and order fostered by Labour’s ‘big state’ to legitimise the reassertion of public responsibility and the rollback of state social support. Neoliberal theory advocates a withdrawal of state management and Conservative framing of their approach as a shift away from ‘big government’ suggested that the state would take a more limited role in intervening in, and managing, people’s lives. However, reduced support for welfare claimants (this in sharp contrast to their response to finance) was accompanied by regulation, surveillance, discipline, and punishment in the form of a coercive and punitive ‘welfare’ system.

Big Society: Legitimising the Rollback of Wider State Social Responsibility

Conservatives asserted that they had the solution to repair “the torn fabric of society” (Conservatives, 2010), and reject “the path of decline” (Cameron, 2010a, b). In addition to the rollback of the welfare state there needed to be a “fundamental change: from big government...to the Big Society...from state action to social action”, from “state control” to “social responsibility” (Conservatives, 2010), “more people power” not “more state power” (Cameron, 2010b). Cameron (2010b) asserted, “these are social problems, they need a social response, so it’s not time for more big government, it’s time for the Big Society”.

Big Society provided what Hall et al (2013 [1978]: 273) term a “positive face”, for the withdrawal of state support and provision⁶⁹. Decentralisation of responsibility for care and welfare” (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 303) was framed using claims of “collective action”, “solidarity”, community empowerment and mutual reliance (Hancock et al, 2012; Sage, 2012: 370). Further demonstrating Westminster audacity, rather than the government being the big spender, the public would be ‘morally good’ giving more of their money and time to their community:

“we will introduce new ways to increase philanthropy, and use the latest insights from behavioural economics to encourage people to make volunteering and community participation something they do on a regular basis” (Conservatives, 2010).

The Big Society would encourage “public-spirited service” where all volunteer for the good of the community (ibid). It was a vision of wholesale volunteerism and privatisation of social support and social services. By implication labour for social ends should be unpaid and ‘charitable’ in marked contrast to the ‘productive’ labour of the ‘real’ ‘wealth producing’ economy.

Conservatives repeatedly reinforced that the public had to be active in a “collective endeavour” to mend Britain (Conservatives, 2010). It required a “national effort”, everyone to “unite” and “pull together” and to remember “we are all in this together” (ibid). Cameron (in First Ministerial Debate, 2010) emphasised “we can only do this if we recognise we need join together, we need to come together, we need to recognise

⁶⁹ Brown (2010c) recognised that the Conservatives’ “‘Big Society’ programme...[was] merely a cover for a major scaling back of public services, affecting those on modest and middle incomes”.

we're all in this together", "there's no doubt the country's going to have to come together to deal with this really big problem of the deficit", "we're all in this together and real change comes when we come together and work together". Conservatives tried to create "the collective imagery... of a nation united in the face of adversity"(Clarke and Newman, 2012: 304). However, as Lupton et al's (2015) research shows sacrifice was heavily weighted on the shoulders of the poorest. The working classes carried the greatest burden (Albo and Evans, 2010; Allen, 2012; Carney et al, 2014; Hancock et al, 2012; Levitas, 2012).

The Conservative manifesto framed passing social responsibility onto the public as the government privileging the public, and trusting them, with a high level of power and therefore control, as breaking the monopoly on political power and democratically devolving it. It was titled: "Invitation to Join the Government of Britain" and Cameron (2010b) stated:

"it is an invitation to the whole nation: we'll give you the power, so you can take control...Let's make this the biggest call to arms the country has seen in a generation...this great invitation, this big opening up of government and public services and our whole political system".

Conservatives informed the public they could be little politicians able to "be...[their] own boss, sack...[their] MP, choose...[their] own school, own...[their] own home, veto council tax rises, vote for police commissioners, save...[their] local post office, see how the government spends...[their] money" (Cameron, 2010b). Conservatives framed their approach as empowering the public and "set[ting] free" (Cameron, 2010c) and "enabl[ing] social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups" (Conservatives, 2010). The *private* sector would also play a key role in the *social* resolution (see Cameron, 2010b). This framing sought to appeal to anti-establishment desires for a relinquishing of power from the Westminster elite to legitimise the withdrawal of state social protection.

Cameron (2010b) stated, "my fundamental belief - there is such thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state". There was an implicit reference to Thatcher's statement that there was no such thing as society. Arguably he sought to distance his brand of Conservatism from Thatcherism (Levitas, 2012; Sage, 2012; Wiggan, 2011).

However, Cameron's concern with society was also distinctly underpinned by neoliberalism and neo-conservatism and also used to legitimise rolling back state social responsibility of vulnerable groups (Hancock et al, 2012; Sage, 2012).

Conclusion

Westminster definers constructed a misleading and disingenuous narrative to legitimise responses that deepened neoliberalism. Definers' focus on bankers' immorality and their refusal to locate such behaviour within its structural context, sought to manufacture ignorance towards neoliberalism's causal role in the crisis. Directing focus from the neoliberal project and to neoliberal targets framed neoliberal responses that continued and intensified causes of the crisis as logical. Conservatives constructed a powerful narrative inaccurately blaming the crisis on Labour's public spending, particularly on the welfare state, to position austerity as the only logical response. Constructions of welfare claimants sought to erode empathy and collectivism to legitimise the rollback of state welfare support and the development of a punitive 'welfare' system for 're-moralising individuals'. The Big Society discourse sought to obscure state relinquishing of social responsibility with collectivism and solidarity, which in the past had been used to legitimise socially just, as opposed to socially unjust, responses.

Private capital on the other hand was constructed as the saviour from crisis and 'business friendly' conditions were therefore not causes of crisis but the route to 'resolution'. This framing sought to justify neoliberal responses, including corporation tax cuts, deregulation of private capital, re-privatisation of banks, and further opening up of the public sector. Blame was misleadingly directed to the public sector and the 'immorality' of those lower down the class hierarchy, and this intensified as the crisis developed. Finance capital and its reform by contrast were pushed down the agenda.

Westminster definers operated to generate misunderstanding of Britain's fiscal position. In this moment, to legitimise austerity and exclude alternative responses they inaccurately claimed that the UK could not tax, borrow or spend anymore and that Britain had no alternative to austerity. This excluded the truth that the UK had

economic freedoms that meant austerity was a government choice. The necessity for fiscal stimulus, was denied with misleading comparisons between the UK and Greece, and bolstered by elite consensus around these constructions.

An absence of challenges facilitated Westminster's dissemination of a narrative that inaccurately represented reality and the 'resolving' of neoliberal crisis with further neoliberal conditions. The following chapter presents an analysis of Westminster's narration of a challenge from the SNP in SIR14.

Chapter Six

A Critical Analysis of Westminster's Narration of the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of Westminster's narration of the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014, including the campaign, results, and aftermath. Better Together Definers' (BTD) discursive strategies in this moment were significant in terms of Westminster's crisis narrative because definers were countering the first discursive challenge to austerity in the crisis. The Scottish National Party claimed to offer an alternative and 'socially just' approach for 'resolution' that contested Westminster's discourses for justifying austerity. Here, it is argued that BTD sought to undermine the credibility of the SNP to discredit their alternative by framing their narrative as a façade to hide their true nationalist agenda. It is shown that Westminster definers narrated a referendum on Scotland's political freedom on classically neoliberal terrain. The chapter also demonstrates that BTD inaccurately portrayed the Labour party as supporting social justice and the protection of harm reduction systems in order to encourage remain votes, constructed remaining as the moral choice, encouraged emotional sense-making by portraying supporting Westminster as being in the interests of family and country, and generated fear and anxiety about the alternative.

The SNP's Challenge

The Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013 legislated for a referendum on Scottish Independence from the United Kingdom held on the 18th September 2014. For Westminster, it presented a constitutional crisis, *potentially* a further loss for UK international power, and harm to the valuable 'British capitalist *brand*'. In David Cameron's (2014a) first speech of the campaign he stated: "centuries of history hang in the balance", "a question mark hangs over the future of our Great Britain", "we matter more as a United Kingdom politically, militarily diplomatically and culturally

too”. Reducing centuries of history and unionist tradition to a modern day marketing imperative, he proclaimed, “we come as a brand”. “Our reputation” in the capitalist world, and therefore investment, trade and borrowing, were threatened⁷⁰.

SIR14 was not only a major constitutional moment but also a major moment for Westminster’s crisis ‘resolution’ plan. In 2011 the SNP had achieved the first majority government in Holyrood, committing to serving Scotland’s interests, achieving a referendum on independence, protecting public services, and reducing inequality (see SNP, 2011). The party was in government in Scotland and simultaneously in opposition to the UK government. Thus, SNP definers were key narrators in Scotland. The SNP’s challenge to the austerity project was central to the referendum. The party’s support in SIR14 was certainly not hindered by its argument for a socially just *alternative* to austerity and arguably it strengthened support. Independence, patriotism and freedom from the perceived undemocratic domination of Westminster were key to arguments for independence. However, a ‘socially just’ alternative to austerity was *central* to the argument for independence. The SNP constructed a logic of equivalence between independence, anti-austerity and social justice, which formed part of a wider logic of difference between the UK and social injustice on the one hand, and an independent Scotland and social justice on the other.

Alex Salmond, the First Minister of Scotland, and Nicola Sturgeon, the deputy First Minister, argued that governments not chosen by Scottish voters ruled undemocratically over Scotland inflicting *unjust* and *unnecessary* austerity. Indeed, Sturgeon (in Carrell, 2012) asserted that her “conviction that Scotland should be independent” stemmed “from the principles, not of identity or nationality, but of democracy and social justice”. Salmond (in Scotland Decides: Salmond versus Darling, 2014) complained: “we couldn’t stop the bedroom tax...we can’t stop the poor and disabled bearing the brunt of welfare cuts. We can’t stop the spread of food banks in this prosperous country”. Challenging Westminster’s construction of ‘there is no alternative’ and their claims that the UK had ‘run out of money’, the SNP argued

⁷⁰ Arguably whilst losing Scotland would increase the likelihood of Conservatives maintaining power for numerous elections to come as they perform the weakest in Scotland, Conservatives would not want to have a even greater financial system (mainly a re-domiciled RBS) on fewer taxpayers shoulders, lose a large percentage of oil revenues or lose more power and influence both within Scotland and internationally.

that an independent Scotland would increase social spending. The IMF and Deutsche Bank questioned whether the SNP's anti-austerity discourse reflected the party's actual plan (see Eaton, 2015; Nelson, 2014), but discursively the party certainly offered an alternative. Consequently, Westminster definers seeking to defend the neoliberal 'resolution' had to counter the SNP's discursive challenge.

Uniting with the Opposition: Better Together

Notwithstanding the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, Scottish Labour MPs were selected to lead the Better Together campaign. Conservative elites gave the leading roles on a historic political and economic issue to their opposition knowing that if they failed it would be the Conservative government that lost Scotland. This contrasted with Conservatives' previous assaults on Brown and Darling's credibility and can be attributed to the extent of Scottish enmity towards the 'Tories'.

Scottish Labour MPs were able to more convincingly construct themselves as personally invested in Scotland's future. Concern for Scotland was enhanced by emphasis on family heritage and education. Leaders were explicit in their personal value assumptions. Darling (2012) declared, "I care deeply about the future of my country. This is my home. Its history, its rich culture, its social ties, are mine: they made me". They highlighted Labour's establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1997. They used plural pronouns, such as 'us' and 'we' to remove perceptions of distance between Scottish voters and Westminster elites and positioned themselves as 'insiders', which strengthened their truth claims about Scottish people's interests. This strategy was key to engender trust in BTd' narrative.

Struggling Over Logics of Equivalence

BTd challenged the SNP's logics of equivalence between the UK and social injustice, and an independent Scotland and social justice, and the wider logic of difference these formed. Labour definers redrew the classifications, constructing logics of equivalence between Labour and social justice, Conservatives and social injustice, and the SNP and a social justice façade to hide a nationalist agenda, in order to portray remaining as the path to social justice. Labour asserted do not trust the SNP, Labour is the genuine article.

Redrawing lines required Labour recognition and critique of socially unjust *Conservative* policies, despite Labour committing to many certainly similar policies. Alexander (2013a) acknowledged “the deep and enduring unpopularity of the Coalition Government” and critiqued the need for food banks, high unemployment, low wages, and cuts to welfare. BTD emphasised the transiency of a Conservative government arguing Britain *could* be socially just but an independent Scotland would not be (see Alexander, 2013a, b; Alexander, 2014a; Darling, 2012).

To position Labour as the party of social justice Alexander (2014a) claimed that the SNP had constructed an inaccurate stereotype of non-Scottish Britons as “austerity loving Tories”. They then argued it ignored Britain’s key values of compassion and solidarity demonstrated in Britain’s care for the ill, the unemployed, and the old through the welfare state and NHS created under Labour. BTD disseminated a discourse of *British* and Labour struggle for social justice demonstrated in anti-Thatcher protests (see Alexander, 2013a), shared conflicts, and through the creation of harm reduction systems.

“We fought two world wars together...there is not a cemetery in Europe that does not have Scots, English, Welsh, and Irish lying side-by-side...and we not only won these wars together, we built the peace together, we built the health service together, we built the welfare state together, we will build the future together” (Brown, 2014a).

“We have achieved so much together, in times of peace and war. We created and then dismantled an empire together. We fought fascism together. We built the Welfare State together. The BBC and the Bank of England were founded by Scots. The NHS was founded by a Welshman. The welfare state was founded by an Englishman. And we would not have achieved half as much if we had not been a United Kingdom, advancing together” (Darling, 2012).

‘Sacrificed’ altruistic soldiers are symbols of pride in Britain’s achievement and reference to them is a strong tool for invoking patriotism. In this context, with great irony, references to sacrificed soldiers and progressive social achievements were being used to gain public support for Westminster elites who were exploiting the crisis by undertaking a rollback of Britain’s post war social achievements. Seeking to emote pride in both creating and dismantling the empire is of course odd. But the reference served a dual purpose: dismantling the empire portrayed Britain as concerned with

social justice but imperialist achievements cultivated patriotism. Drawing upon an “imperialist nostalgia” (Hall and Jacques, 1983: 100) is a key strategy for attaining consensus (Hall et al, 1978). Britain is at once both powerful and progressive.

BTD’ reference to Labour’s progressive past and its achievements to counter the SNP’s challenge contrasted with Labour’s contemporary crisis discourses in the other two INMs that focused on ‘fairness’ not equality or social justice, and which advocated cuts to welfare and privatisation of the NHS. An inaccurate ‘progressive’ representation of a Labour party that had moved decisively to the right over the last two decades was constructed to portray remaining as the progressive option.

Moreover, for BTD, the SNP’s concern for social justice was a façade to mask its nationalist agenda (see Alexander, 2013a). Lamont, (2013), leader of the Scottish Labour party, stated that Labour needed to work to defeat “the politics of nationalism”. Alexander (2013b) described an “obsession with separation” as “the lodestar of the present Nationalist Government at Holyrood”, contrasting this with his claim that he was motivated by challenging welfare reform that punished the poor. The SNP was constructed as offering ‘narrow’ *nationalism* that was a *threat* to *British* social justice achievements. As Brown (2014a) put it “what we have built together by sacrificing and sharing, let no narrow nationalism split asunder ever”. To portray the SNP’s economic plan as detrimental to social justice, BTD proclaimed it *unviable*. They reasserted that borrowing and spending *could not* increase and that in an independent Scotland taxes *would have* to dramatically increase and there *would have* to be greater cuts in an economic downturn (see Scotland Office⁷¹, 2014a; Scotland Office and Campbell, 2014). BTD argued that SNP ‘falsehoods’ disputing the necessity of austerity were constructed to serve their nationalist agenda. They sought to undermine the SNP’s claimed agenda and therefore their contestation of the necessity of austerity. For their part, the SNP maintained their logic of equivalence between Westminster and social injustice with Salmond (in Salmond versus Darling: The Debate, 2014) painting Darling as leading austerity and as “in bed with” the ‘Tories’⁷².

⁷¹ The Scotland Office is the UK government department for Scotland.

⁷² Bernard Ponsonby (in Salmond versus Darling: The Debate 2014), a presenter of one of the televised debates, supported this, stating:

Best of Both Worlds?

To manage a growing desire for change, which polls suggested the SNP were successfully exploiting⁷³, and to counter the SNP's argument that Westminster undemocratically dominated Scotland, BTD eventually offered Scotland a change from the status quo. At first, BTD argued that Scotland already had 'the best of both worlds' – the advantages of decision-making in the Scottish Parliament with the security and strength of Britain therefore, change was not required (see Alexander, 2014b). However, as support for the SNP alternative grew, BTD pledged change and greater power for Scottish Parliament so it *could* have the 'best of both worlds'. An embattled language developed. To demonstrate the shift, in Cameron's (2014a) February 2014 speech 'change' was used only twice, neither time positively, for example, "if the UK changed, we would rip the rug from our own reputation". In contrast, in Cameron's speech in the week preceding the referendum, 'change' had its own section, the word featured fifteen times and all but one of those uses were to advocate change in Britain. "Yes, we need change" he asserted "and we will deliver it" (Cameron, 2014b). He elaborated:

"you can get real, concrete change on Thursday: if you vote No. 'Business as usual' is not on the ballot paper. The status quo is gone. This campaign has swept it away. There is no going back to the way things were. A vote for No means real change. And we have spelled that change out in practical terms, with a plan and a process. If we get a No vote on Thursday, that will trigger a major, unprecedented programme of devolution with additional powers for the Scottish Parliament. Major new powers over tax, spending, and welfare services".

BTD then, offered Scottish voters an alternative to the status quo so that a desire for change did not require independence and unlike the SNP 'alternative' they portrayed

"can you actually look this audience straight in the eye on the issue of poorer when you were Chancellor of the Exchequer that resided over a banking crisis, which has ushered in austerity and which is currently leading to the prospect of parents queuing up at food banks in order to feed their children?"

⁷³ The SNP's yes campaign gained significant momentum and attained 44.65 per cent of the vote share (see Electoral Management Board for Scotland, 2014), compared to poll results in May 2013 of 26 to 30 per cent (see Economic and Social Research Council, 2015). Moreover, 84.6 per cent of eligible voters voted (Electoral Management Board for Scotland, 2014), which is a high rate of voter turnout and significantly higher than the GE15 turnout.

it as economically viable and coupled with security. The SNP's discourse of Westminster domination and a public desire for change had proved powerful influences on Westminster's narrative.

To gain public trust towards its commitment, BTM used language that connoted real *action* and a sense of *urgency*. Brown (2014b, emphasis added) claimed that “a ‘no’ vote on 18 September will not be an end point, but the *starting gun* for action on 19 September, when *straight away* we will *kick off* a plan to deliver the enhanced devolution that we want”. In marked contrast, once the referendum result was announced, Hague (in Hansard, 2014a), acting in place of the Prime Minister, used the term “renewal” as opposed to change when discussing Scottish powers, and English votes for English laws was announced. The Labour party delivered the referendum for Westminster; the Conservatives did not fully honour commitments to Scotland. Not sharing information about real plans and Labour's response to this is returned to in the final section of this chapter.

Happily Ever After or Damaging Divorce

Key to BTM's narrative was a metaphor of a personal relationship. In accordance with Lakoff's (2016) theorisation that conceptual metaphors encourage the public to make sense of an issue in accordance with the common sense understanding of another issue, the metaphor encouraged decoders to make sense of the referendum choices through their understanding of personal relationships to frame rejection of the SNP path as the moral act.

BTM constructed Scottish people and others in Britain as “neighbours”, “friends” (Alexander, 2013a, b), “a family of nations” (Cameron, 2014b; Hague in Hansard, 2014), a “marriage of nations” (Cameron, 2014a) and a “community” (Darling, 2012). The referendum, Alexander (2013b) stated, was “not just about the politics and power tied up in constitutional arrangements”. Rather it was “about neighbours...families...friendships...solidarity...what it means to share our lives together on these islands”. In sharp contrast to narration of the other intense narration moments where Westminster definers emphasised difference and separated groups, British people were spoken of as a collective and collectivism was praised and used to evoke pride. Definers sought to counter the SNP's construction of difference and

distance and cultivate a sense of connection and shared responsibility for one another (see Alexander, 2013a).

After constructing a perception of a close relationship, BTM framed the SNP's claims of social justice and also independence as contradictory because they simultaneously advocated compassion and solidarity on the one hand, and on the other walking away from a neighbour/ friend/ family member during a difficult time. Alexander (2013a) asked, "how do we help each other be the neighbours we would want to be rather than conclude that we should just walk away and leave our neighbours to struggle on their own?";

"The surest foundation on which to build that progressive future is instead determined by how we uphold an ethic of neighbourliness—both within Scottish society and beyond it, towards our neighbours across the rest of the UK" (Alexander, 2013b).

BTM constructed the referendum as "a test of" (Alexander, 2013b), and "chance to reaffirm" Scotland's moral values (Darling, 2012) and "ethic of neighbourliness" (Alexander, 2013b). Those advocating independence were framed as not truly valuing social justice. Alexander (2014a) asserted, "for Scottish nationalists... loyalty and solidarity cease to exist" beyond Scotland's border. Somewhat ironically, Westminster framed supporting a more socially just alternative to austerity as an 'injustice' to their neighbours.

Whilst BTM's earlier texts positively emphasised togetherness and *mentioned* separation, as support for the SNP's alternative grew, BTM's emphasis shifted to the potentially imminent *divorce*. In one speech alone in the week preceding the referendum Cameron (2014b) stated: "independence would not be a trial separation it would be a painful divorce"; "split"; "the end of a country that all of us call home and we built this home together"; "for the people of Scotland to walk away now would be like painstakingly building a home—and then walking out the door and throwing away the keys"; "I ask you to vote no to walking away"; "split up forever"; "ripping your country apart"; "breaking ties"; "going it alone" "put up walls, score new lines on the map"; "dividing people, closing doors, making foreigners of our friends and family" ask yourself "do I really want to turn my back on the rest of Britain", "don't turn your

back on what is the best family of nations in the world and the best hope for your family in this world”; “Please – do not break this family apart”. Continuing the metaphor and choosing an intensely emotional style, Cameron (2014b) made a truth claim on behalf of Britain and a personal value commitment as he pleaded with Scotland not to ‘walk away’: “we want you to stay. Head and heart and soul, we want you to stay”, “so please from all of us: Vote to stick together, vote to stay”. Similarly, Gove (cited in Riley-Smith and Furness, 2014) stated “Please Scotland, we want you, we need you, we love you, let's stay together”.

Furthermore, BTU emphasised the enormity, seriousness and permanency of the decision and the consequences for children, and these discourses also intensified, as the referendum grew closer. The referendum, Cameron (2014b) stated, “could change the United Kingdom forever” and “end the United Kingdom as we know it”; “the future of our country is at stake”; “there is no going back from this”; “no re-run”; “a once and for all decision”; “the end of the country we love”; “the United Kingdom would be no more”; “ending-for good, for ever”; “once-and-for-all decision”; “the stakes couldn’t be higher - there is no going back if we decide to go”. Statements warning of the consequences for children included: “to warn of the consequences...is like warning a friend about a decision they might take that will affect the rest of their lives – and the lives of their children”. Brown (2014a) stated, “now tomorrow the vote I will cast is not for me. It is for my children. It is for all of Scotland’s children. It is for our children’s future”, and the actress in Better Together UK (2014a) stated, “I’m voting for my children’s future and all Scottish children’s future and that’s why I’m voting no”.

The metaphor of a personal relationship framed voting for independence as a parent walking away from their marriage and their family home, leaving their children to an uncertain future. Portraying the relationship as personal, as opposed to constitutional, and the deeply moralised discourse encouraged emotional sense-making and sense-making through the neo-conservative moral value of ‘committed families’, ironically to generate support for a project that harmed many families.

Staying Together versus Going it Alone

A pivotal construction of BTB' narration was a logic of difference between 'staying together' and 'going it alone'. When othering a group, positive 'information' is expressed about 'us' and negative about them – the threat. Applying this theory to scenarios, BTB expressed positives about staying together and emphasised 'negatives' of independence positioning it as a threat to Scotland. They classified positive against negative nouns and used antonyms of words in the opposing group (see table two), creating logics of equivalence between the words in each column, to explicate differences between the two scenarios. Utilising mythopoesis, the logics stipulated to the public that if Scotland remained good things would happen but if they chose independence bad things would happen in order to generate fear and anxiety about the alternative.

Table Two: The Nouns and Antonyms of Better Together Definers' Logic of Difference

'Staying Together'	'Going It Alone'
security, certainty, and shared burden	insecurity, uncertainty, risk, and unaffordability
power and influence	no power and influence
the great British brand	new unproven brand or even a negative financial record
ability to support a large financial industry	inability to support a large financial industry

(In)Security, (Un)Certainty and a (Un)shared Burden

'Staying together' was constructed as providing security and certainty because Britain, bigger, more powerful, and possessing international credibility, could provide protection, both military and economically, from an uncertain world and share the burden of challenges. Darling (in Scotland Decides: Salmond versus Darling, 2014) stated that "being part of the United Kingdom" meant Scotland had the "strength and security" required to fund the NHS alongside growing "pressures of an ageing population".

In contrast, 'going it alone' was constructed as taking an insecure and uncertain path, which presented risks that Scotland would be vulnerable to without the protection of the UK. Darling (2012) stated, "times are really tough at home and really uncertain...the last things we need are the new areas of uncertainty, instability, and division that separation will involve". The message was that if people thought times

were hard now, the alternative path would be harder. A key technique of constructing a perception of insecurity, uncertainty, and vulnerability was to describe independence, as a path of known and unknown hazards from which there was no return using fear-generating language. For Brown (2014a), it was “an economic minefield where problems could implode at any time” and for Osborne (2014b), “a high-risk experiment that may not work at all”.

“An economic trapdoor down which we go from which we might never escape...a massive financial hole that cannot be made up, even a fraction of it, by oil revenues. A massive financial hole that means the risk to the National Health Service does not come from us, it comes from the policies of the Scottish National Party” (Brown, 2014c).

Independence was constructed as a *threat to* existing social justice measures, which contrasted with the SNP’s construction of it as a *means for* greater social justice measures. The centrality of risk to BTd’s narration, and their shift in emphasis to potential negatives and the risks and uncertainty of independence (see Darling, 2014a), were evident in the changing of their campaign slogan in June 2014 from ‘Better Together’, reflecting the construction of a personal relationship, to ‘No Thanks’ (see Darling in Salmond versus Darling: The Debate’ 2014; Darling in Scotland Decides: Salmond versus Darling, 2014).

Reinforcing their logic of equivalence between Britain and social justice, BTd constructed Britain as sharing fiscal risks and pooling resources to ensure basic rights, wellbeing, and decent standards of living across the nations. They claimed ‘going it alone’ was risky as Scotland would endure its own burdens (see Alexander, 2014a; Better Together UK, 2014b, c).

“I ask you to look ahead to the longer-term challenges we face as a country: competing for jobs and business in the global race...providing good careers for our children, supporting an ageing population, managing with lower North Sea oil revenues and consider: to which of these great challenges is dividing up the United Kingdom the right solution?” (Osborne, 2014b).

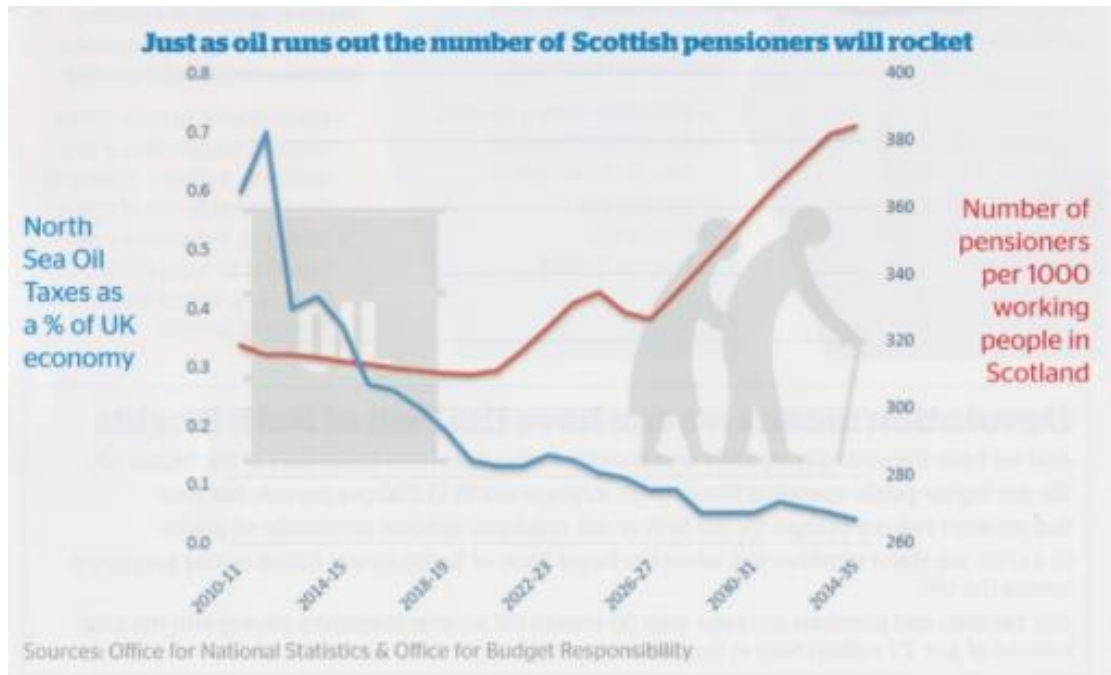
BTd argued that the challenges facing Scotland were best shared on the shoulders of 63 million people rather than 5 million, or 30 million taxpayers instead of 2.7 million (see Better Together UK, 2014b; Darling in Scotland Decides: Salmond versus

Darling, 2014). No emphasis was given to Scotland having to share the burden of England and Wales' challenges in exchange. Scotland sharing the burden with Britain, Osborne (2014b) stated, would mean "the full force of any adjustment to an economic shock would have to be borne in full by Scottish taxpayers". He argued that fiscal risk sharing could smooth out a shock or threat in one part of the shared currency area, for example a severe drop in the price of oil or a major bank failing, but was only viable if Scotland remained part of the UK. If it went alone it could use the currency, but as the UK would reject a currency union, there would be no motivation for Britain to aid Scotland. Scotland would have to shoulder its own economic problems.

The SNP's desire for a currency union was a key focus of BTU's critique of the challenge and a major problem in the case for independence. If an 'independent' Scotland had a currency union with the UK it would not attain real independence because it could not adjust the value of its currency, choose to engage in quantitative easing, its borrowing and spending would be limited, it would not have the fiscal freedoms the UK has. Drawing upon the relationship metaphor, Osborne (2014c) described it as "a couple getting divorced but saying we're going to keep the current account and we're going to keep the joint mortgage". Whilst BTU did not want to draw attention to the UK's economic freedom, which would contradict its claims about austerity, it argued that Scotland would not be independent if it used sterling because power would be held in the UK (see Darling in Scotland Decides: Salmond versus Darling, 2014). BTU framed a non-currency union as exposure to risk and a currency union as not providing Scotland true independence and control over its economy. The story was that independence would definitely lead to a bad ending whether there was a currency union or not.

To generate concern about affordability of social costs in an independent Scotland, BTU focused upon Scotland's reliance on oil tax revenues to fund schools, hospitals, but mainly the pensions of an ageing population, which was constructed as risky given volatile oil prices and declining oil stocks (see Better Together UK, 2014b; Darling in Salmond versus Darling: The Debate, 2014; Scotland Office, 2014). Better Together UK (2014b) presented a graph of "north sea oil taxes as a % of UK economy" and the "number of pensioners per 1000 working people in Scotland". Presenting the information in a graph constructs the perception of mathematical fact.

Image One: Graph from Better Together (2014b)



The graph is alarmist: the term “rocket” suggests it will be rapid, sudden and uncontrollable and the large gap between the ends of the red and blue lines indicates an unaffordable expense. However, it is misleading. It uses the percentage of UK tax revenues but if Scotland voted yes to independence, and Scotland successfully won the struggle over oil resources and a median line was drawn (see Macalister, 2012) Scotland would have 90 percent of North Sea oil therefore North Sea oil taxes as a percentage of the Scottish economy would be higher than the graph suggests. Also, there are different ‘expert’ views on the durability of Scottish oil. For example, the expert that informed the BBC News (2014a) facts and figures estimated there could be “thirty-forty years of production remaining”. The graph claims there are only twenty, using a low estimation rather than a median estimation. Furthermore, the axis for percentage of tax revenue starts at zero but the axis for number of pensioners per 1000 working people starts at 260, which makes the gap on the right axis much wider to support the construction of ‘rocket’.

BTD sought to also cultivate concern about household affordability of independence. They suggested average increases in household costs (see Better Together, 2014b) and framed independence as taking a “gamble” not only with tax revenues, business investment, schools, pensions, hospitals, but also jobs, borrowing rates, savings, and

mortgages (see Better Together UK, 2014d; Darling, 2014a; Darling in Salmond versus Darling: The Debate, 2014; Scotland Office and Campbell, 2014). BTd engaged in intertextuality, incorporating into their texts quotations from members of the public to authenticate their claims (see Better Together UK, 2014c). Close to the referendum several major corporations and their CEOs reinforced the construction by also invoking concern about national and household affordability of independence including Sir Michael Cheshire (see Ruddick, 2014) and Sir Charlie Mayfield (Johnson, 2014). Royal Bank of Scotland (2014a) threatened re-domiciliation to cultivate fear about jobs and tax revenues. Given the alignment of private and public interests, again the message was that households would suffer if corporations were not gifted the conditions they desired to deliver growth, employment, and tax revenues. Founders and CEOs of oil industry corporations and a financial elite made large donations to the BT campaign⁷⁴.

A Mighty and Influential Superpower

BTd constructed Britain as having international power and influence that allowed it to protect its citizens and their interests and to globally struggle for others' rights. They claimed British power would be compromised without Scotland, and an independent Scotland would have to start building its own institutions and power for protection and influence (see Cameron, 2014a; Darling, 2012). BTd emphasised Britain's "clout" (Cameron, 2014a; Darling, 2012), "military might" (Cameron, 2014a), "economic might", "military prowess" (Cameron, 2014b), and "major military force" (Scotland Office, 2014b). In contrast to his calls in the UK referendum on European Union membership 2016 for the UK to leave Europe, Gove (cited in Riley-Smith and Furness, 2014) argued that if Scotland left the UK, both would be more vulnerable to attack because they would appear unstable and weak and this would make some other countries stronger in comparison.

⁷⁴ Ian Taylor, CEO of Vitriol a oil and gas company and a regular Conservative donor, donated £500,000 (Gordon, 2013). Alan Savage, founder of Orion Group a Scottish and "leading recruitment provider to the Oil & Gas, Automotive, Power & Utilities, Renewables and Mining industries" (Orion, 2015), donated £100,000 (Gordon, 2013). Charles Richie, founder of Score group a Scottish repair service for the UK oil and gas industry (Score Group, 2015), donated £50,000 (Gordon, 2015). Douglas Flint, Chairman of HSBC holdings Plc. donated £25,000 (ibid).

Cameron (2014a) described the UK as a “soft power superpower” and the Scotland Office (2014b) stated, “the UK is ranked 2nd globally by Monocle as a ‘soft power’ (our ability to influence thanks to our culture, education, business environment and values)”. The UK was constructed as able to persuade and influence international bodies and other nations to operate in ways that served British interests, and the interests of vulnerable populations across the globe. For example, “our interests are protected through a global network and our longstanding diplomatic relationships give us advantages in our dealings with other countries” (Scotland Office, 2014b); “we have shown them that democracy and prosperity can go hand in hand; that resolution is found not through the bullet but through the ballot box” (Cameron, 2014a);

“The UK is also a respected champion of human rights, defending democracy and rule of law all over the world, as well as playing a big part in the fight against sexual violence. Together we can continue to act for the common good and stand up for our common beliefs and values” (Scotland Office, 2014b).

This supports Wolin’s (2008: 53) argument that Britain does not overtly “seek the traditional form of empire”. Rather, it favourably constructs itself as a liberal democracy that democratically exercises its power abroad to secure democracy for others and trumpets “the cause of democracy worldwide” (ibid: 47). Soft power superpower is also useful for making sense of the state’s power and influence within its sovereign border. The state possesses the physical might to protect its interests and to enforce its ideas. However, to maintain its legitimacy it constructs itself as liberal democratic, as acting in accordance with the public voice and using force as a last resort, but uses its discursive power to ‘manage’ public sense-making, reinforced by its physical might. The construction of the UK as both democratic and powerful sought to invoke a sense of pride and perception of protection, and fear of losing these if Scotland voted for the alternative path.

The Great British Brand

BTD’ logic of difference stipulated that independence would mean walking away from, and harming, the Great British *brand*. Definers stated that the British *brand*⁷⁵ attracts business, facilitates free trade, including in the EU, and allows borrowing at a

⁷⁵ Scotland Office (2014b) emphasised the brand’s international standing: “we have the third strongest nation brand...according to the 2013 Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index, and the fourth most valuable according to the 2013 Brand Finance Nation Brands report”.

cheaper rate, which means lower rates for British businesses and mortgages (Scotland Office, 2014a, c). Despite Scotland being part of Britain since 1706 they suggested that an independent Scotland would possess no share of its reputation and the ‘new’ country would have to build a new *brand* (see Scotland Office and Campbell, 2014), and would therefore have higher borrowing rates. Reinforcing the construction of a threat to household finances, Osborne (2014b) asserted that an independent Scotland “would have to pay an ‘independence premium’ to borrow from the markets that would be added onto households’ mortgage repayments.

In response to Salmond’s assertion that an independent Scotland would *only* take a share of UK debt if there was a currency union, Osborne (2014b) argued Scotland would have a *negative* financial record and *brand* image and consequently the country and households would be punished. He warned:

“international lenders would look at Scotland and see a fledgling country whose only credit history was one *gigantic default*. And they would *demand a punitively high* interest rate as a result. That would be *crippling* for every Scottish household with a mortgage or personal loan, for every Scottish business with credit, for the public finances and therefore for public services and for taxpayers, and for the whole economy. If an independent Scotland reneged on its debts it would become an *outcast* among the family of responsible economic nations” (ibid, emphasis added).

He threatened Scotland with the prospect of becoming categorised as irresponsible alongside Greece in the dichotomy of good and bad countries. Osborne’s claim contributed to the generation of concern about national and household affordability of independence and the *viability* of the SNP’s plans. BTD asserted Scotland would not be allowed to keep the currency but would have to take a share of the debt to be credible, and if they did use the currency they would not have independence, again framing all outcomes of independence as bad.

Ability to Support a Large Financial System

BTD claimed that the size and strength of Britain’s finance infrastructure and economy meant it could sustain a very large banking system, much larger than the country’s GDP (see Better Together, 2014b; Darling, 2012; Osborne, 2014b). BTD constructed Britain as fortunate to be in a position to bail out its banks because it attracted ‘wealth

creating' corporations and suggested an independent Scotland would not be in such a 'fortunate' position. Cameron (2014b) warned Scottish independence "would mean – for any banks that remain in Scotland – if they ever got in trouble it would be Scottish taxpayers and Scottish taxpayers alone that would bear the costs". Westminster implicitly committed to another bailout for banks and recognised the continued vulnerability of taxpayers to further major financial crisis. BTB did not apply the moral hazard argument to banks. Neoliberal dictates, as ever, would be only selectively applied.

BTB also suggested an independent Scotland's size and strength would deter major banks, having major consequences for jobs and tax income:

"it is extremely difficult to see how Scotland could remain a home to large financial institutions like RBS. RBS would have undergone a disorderly collapse without the support of the whole UK in 2008 – and even for a country of our size, it was a huge endeavor. An independent Scotland would have been unable to bail it out" (Osborne, 2014b).

The week before the referendum the Royal Bank of Scotland (2014) stated "the vote on independence is a matter for the Scottish people" but informed of its contingency plan to re-domicile to England in the eventuality of independence. It stated its decision was due to "material uncertainties...which could have a bearing on the Bank's credit ratings, and the fiscal, monetary, legal and regulatory landscape to which it is subject" but that it would "retain a significant level of its operations and employment in Scotland". Seeking to protect the privileges granted by Westminster, the RBS story of Scottish independence also had a bad ending, major business would re-domicile and the nation and households would suffer.

Banks were used as a bi-threat; they were constructed as a threat to an independent Scotland if they stayed because they would *have* to be bailed out by Scottish taxpayers and a threat if they left because they would take jobs and taxes. Once again the narrative stipulated that if independence was taken bad things would definitely happen, which bad things were not yet confirmed, in order to generate fear and anxiety about the SNP's alternative.

The debate over political freedom was predominantly conducted on classically neoliberal financial/economic territory. A key focus was on the Great British brand, the cost of mortgages and debt, currency, and the ‘costs and benefits’ of the financial industry. In contrast, proponents of Brexit in the referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU British ‘sovereignty’ seemed to be placed above neoliberal economic ‘common sense’.

Ignorance: An Accusation, a Threat, and a Strategy

To counter the SNP’s challenging of their austerity project BTD used ignorance in three ways: to undermine the SNP’s credibility, as a threat to create fear and anxiety, and, to encourage voters to not genuinely understand the bigger issues, alternatives, and consequences but be concerned about risks.

BTB constructed themselves as sharing the truth (see Brown, 2014a; Darling, 2012) and providing facts (see Scotland Office and Campbell, 2014). Through intertextuality, experts’ views, including Prime Ministers, political theorists, philosophers and the Governor of the Bank of England (see Alexander, 2013a), were used to provide what Van Leeuwen (2007) calls authoritative legitimisation. They used terms such as “commitment”, “promises”, delivered”, “honoured” (Cameron, 2014c) and “set in stone” (Cameron, 2014b). Westminster party leaders collectively provided a vow and a timetable of dates so that their plans appeared clear, accurate and consequently they could, it seemed, be held to account more easily (see Cameron et al, 2014). Osborne (2014b) claimed that Better Together facts were informed by “rigorous and objective analysis”, which was contrasted with the SNP’s approach that Darling (in Salmond versus Darling: The Debate, 2014) captured as “guessing work, blind faith and crossed fingers”. For Alexander (2014b), the “SNP...[had] given up trying to educe evidence...[they were] simply appealing to emotion”.

BTB accused the SNP of deliberately failing to provide answers to public questions, misleading the public by misquoting and using a range of figures and inaccurate stereotypes that misrepresented reality, re-constructing the meaning of key concepts for political purposes, engaging in trickery, knowingly making inaccurate claims or lying, withholding knowledge, information, and evidence, and keeping secrets, giving contradictory messages, and creating a gap between their words and their actions. For example: “you said something you knew was not true” (Darling in Salmond versus

Darling: The Debate, 2014), “a secret Scottish Government document admitted...” (Better Together, 2014c), “a Nationalist strategy of reassurance collapsing under the weight of its own falsehood” (Alexander, 2014a). BTd drew direct comparisons between yes campaigners’ ‘production of ignorance’ and their dissemination of ‘truth’ and ‘facts’. Alexander (2014a) stated that the SNP’s “bluster and bluff” had come face to face with the BT campaign’s “brick wall of facts”. He also dedicated a whole speech to challenging the SNP’s “myths” (see HM Treasury, Scotland Office and Alexander, 2014). Negative attributes were projected onto the threat – ‘they manufacture ignorance’, and BTd were positioned as eroding ignorance – where possible. BTd called for SNP definers to tell the truth and engage in real debate. Alexander (2014a, b) publicly asked Salmond, “what’s the truth behind the deception?”, suggested the SNP had “hollowed out and constrained” debate and criticised its “vitriol” and “shallowness”. BTd claimed that the SNP’s manufacturing of ignorance would result in an independent Scotland facing a hidden reality. Cameron (2014b) did not “want the people of Scotland to be sold a dream that disappears”. For BTd, the discourses of SNP could not be trusted. The SNP made similar accusations about BTd (for an example see Salmond, 2014). Competing accusations of ignorance manufacturing can cause and deepen dissatisfaction with party politics and encourage perceptions that all are untrustworthy leading to withdrawals from party politics.

Secondly, in an attempt to cultivate fear about the alternative, BTd claimed there was a high level of genuine unknowingness (the knowledge could not possibly be known) about how an independent Scotland would work. Scotland Office and Campbell (2014) stated, “no one has all the answers, but [claimed] to help make sure you’re in the know about what we do know...” and “the fact is, no one has all the facts”. In relation to how much each country paid towards pensions, Darling (in Salmond versus Darling: The Debate, 2014) stated “the answer to that, like so much else in this debate is we simply do not know”. However, this and other elements of how an independent Scotland could and would work were not genuinely unknowable, and certainly there was available information that could have been shared but was not. This was not what Procter (2008: 3) calls “native state” ignorance, when the pursuit of knowledge has just not progressed that far. Rather, Westminster definers restrained the pursuit of this information for political reasons. In the case of pensions, Scottish and other British elites could have debated before the referendum how pensions would be paid and

explored the issue. Whilst, the SNP attempted to project a vision of an independent Scotland, BTD sought to blur this vision by presenting it as the great unknown, strategically constructing aspects of the knowable as fundamentally unobtainable.

Thirdly, rather than using television and poster advertisements to focus on key issues, details, and complexities informed by evidence, BTD disseminated reductive statements devoid of knowledge information, evidence, and substance. Definers, drawing upon the social value of children and patriotism, argued independence would risk Scotland and children's future. Better Together produced a television advert about 'the woman who made up her mind' (see Better Together UK, 2014d). It portrayed a politically ignorant woman who did not know who Alex Salmond was, was more concerned with her family eating cereal on time than debating politics, and who did not have time to think about independence. The woman repeated BTD's discourses about the enormity of the decision, the risks to her children's future, and the wider risks of independence. Finally, she reasoned that she would do what was best for her family and Scotland – vote no. The message was that there was no need to genuinely understand the issues, engage in debate or detail, if you do not want to risk your children and Scotland's future all you need to know is that you need to vote no. Similarly on the 1st September 2014 Darling launched a poster campaign with the widely repeated statements 'I love Scotland, I'm Saying No Thanks' 'I Love my Family, I'm Saying No Thanks' and 'We Love Our Kids, We're Saying No Thanks' (see Huffington Post UK, 2014).

BTB also withheld information or quieted discussion of some difficult areas preventing genuine understanding. Lamont et al (cited in Eaton, 2014) imprinted on their scroll: "we believe that Scotland should have a stronger Scottish Parliament while retaining full representation for Scotland in the UK Parliament". 'English votes for English laws' was not mentioned during the campaign but it was a key feature of Cameron's statement immediately after the result and became the focus of the House of Commons debate on Scottish powers (see Hansard, 2014a). If Cameron had shared this outcome before the referendum it would have reinforced the SNP's argument, and public concerns, that Westminster limited Scotland's power. Following this announcement indeed, Westminster definers' unity fractured. Brown (in Hansard, 2014b) argued that Scotland should not lose some of its British parliamentary powers

and that the Conservatives were recanting on their claim that they did not want “to withdraw Scottish Members of Parliament from voting on tax laws or other laws within the UK”. Brown (2014b) highlighted that Cameron’s English votes statement contrasted with his commitment’s to increase Scotland’s power:

“in practice, the proposal turns out not to be any new English rights of representation, but a reduction in Scottish rights of representation in this House of Commons. That issue was clearly material to the referendum. It is the failure to tell people of the proposed change in Scottish representation before the vote that has fuelled the demonstrations, petitions and allegations of bad faith, betrayal and breach of promise that have dominated too much of the Scottish political debate since the referendum”.

Darling (2014b) stated greater Scottish powers:

“was promised, it’s got to be delivered, and anyone who welches on that will pay a very heavy price for years to come. It is simply non-negotiable...Or put it another way: if anyone attempts to get out of that, how will anyone be believed on anything they’ve got to say? It is simply non-negotiable. I’m very, very clear about that”.

In an accurate reading of hegemony in this moment, which was given greater impetus by the growing support for challenges, Darling (2014b) recognised:

“there’s a great deal of disillusionment, frustration, anger amongst the population, of which Scotland picked up the first symptom of it. It’s alive in the rest of the UK as well. There’s a big lesson for all political parties here. We need to start engaging”.

Andrew Marr responded by suggesting “a quiet uprising against politics as usual in the Westminster elite?”, to which Darling stated “Yeah people want that power back; and if you ignore that, you do so at your peril”. Darling (2014c) pleaded for “every political party...[to] listen to” the “cry for change”. As the next chapter and the conclusion show Darling’s plea rang hollow with Westminster but was taken up with great effect by challengers.

Conclusion

The Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 INM marked the first moment in the crisis period in which a political party challenged Westminster’s narrative and ‘resolution’. SNP definers sought to counter Westminster’s attempt to create an

inaccurate understanding of Britain's fiscal position and argue that austerity was not logical or necessary. They positioned Westminster as choosing a socially unjust approach and their own party as committed to a socially just alternative. Consequently, Westminster definers, to protect their project and to encourage Scottish voters to reject the SNP alternative, discursively countered the challenge.

BTD reasserted the falsehood that the UK could not spend anymore to protect their assertion that there was no alternative and to portray the SNP's alternative as unviable. Westminster definers' narration of the referendum was largely positioned on classically neoliberal terrain; the focus was financial costs and risks. Attempting to achieve it would be harmful for Scottish national and household finances. Whilst progress against austerity was made in this moment BTD 'won the day'. BTD sought to undermine the SNP anti-austerity and pro-social justice claims as a façade to hide a 'narrow' nationalist agenda. Portraying the SNP's alternative economic approach as leading to economic harm reinforced this portrayal of them as 'narrow' nationalists.

In order to prevent the SNP's alternative as being viewed as the path to social justice, Labour struggled for the title of the party of social justice itself. Labour BTD presented progressive perspectives from within the Labour party notwithstanding that these were in fact marginalised within the party and contradicted by its stance in relation to the wider crisis. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, even in 2010 Labour focussed on fairness instead of equality. The party no longer supported past social achievements and it was actually committed to eroding the welfare benefit system and a fully nationalised NHS. Labour was inaccurately portrayed to encourage a misunderstanding of its planned crisis 'resolution' and to counter the SNP's challenge.

BTD framed remaining as the moral decision and encouraged sense-making through a moralistic metaphor of a personal relationship and patriotic stories that portrayed independence as immoral. They sought to generate fear and anxiety about voting for the alternative by preventing attainable information and not engaging in debate, through an alarmist graph, by constructing independence as a path of unknown hazards, and by presenting the alternative as always leading to a bad ending.

As evidence grew of a strong public desire for change and to prevent the SNP benefitting from this, Westminster political leaders disingenuously made commitments to granting Scotland greater power whilst remaining in the UK. They remained silent as to their true intentions on English votes for English laws until after the results were in.

Although BTD successfully attained a no vote, they did not wholly counter the SNP's challenge. Whilst Scotland remained part of the UK, GE15 results suggest that the SNP's construction as the party of social justice was ultimately far more powerful than Labour's attempt to attain the title. A key focus of the following chapter, which turns attention to the GE15 INM, is Westminster definers' countering of the development of the SNP's challenge in GE15.

Chapter Seven

A Critical Analysis of Westminster's Narration of the General Election 2015

Introduction

This chapter contributes an analysis of Westminster's narration of the General Election 2015, including the campaign, results, and aftermath. Through comparative analysis with GE10 it identifies the structuring of the agenda to support a 'resolution' that continued and intensified neoliberal conditions. It examines the discursive strategies deployed in the Westminster collective effort to position the continuation of austerity as economically and morally necessary as well as desirable. It considers the differential application of 'meritocracy' to justify differing responses towards the wealthy, and the construction of private capital as the saviour of the NHS, to prepare the public for

further privatisation. A key focus is Westminster's narration of the SNP, Green Party, and Plaid Cymru's challenging of austerity and social injustice, and their narration of UKIP's challenge seeking to restrain the free movement of people through independence from the EU.

'Successful' Narration?

GE15 results were of particular significance for four reasons. Firstly, notwithstanding the harms and injustice of its tenure, and failure by its own definitions⁷⁶, the Conservatives attained an unexpected majority⁷⁷. Secondly, growth in support of *smaller* parties grew and the three Westminster parties collectively had a *significantly lower* share of the vote. In GE10 they received 88.1 percent of votes but in GE15 they attained only 75.2 percent (see BBC News, 2010b; BBC News, 2015c). "56 percent of the electorate" did "not give the two main parties their vote" (Dorling, 2016b). "Only 24 percent of the electorate voted for the Conservatives, 20 percent for Labour, 22 percent for other parties and 34 percent didn't vote" (ibid). Thirdly, voter turnout in Scotland was significantly higher than in GE10 (UK Political Info, 2015)⁷⁸. The SNP attained 56 of 59 seats across Scotland, a 50 percent vote share (BBC News 2015c), and a swing of an historic magnitude⁷⁹ (Macwhirter, 2015). Fourthly, UKIP attained the third highest vote share at 12.6 percent, a significant increase from 2010 (BBC News, 2015c) and its votes came from previous abstainers and defectors from all three Westminster parties (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Whilst the Conservatives were ultimately successful in attaining the power to continue implementing their 'neoliberal

⁷⁶ The party failed to meet their own targets on debt, deficit, and immigration, and broke their commitments to not raising VAT or undertaking top down reorganisation of the NHS.

⁷⁷ The official explanation provided for the inaccurate polls is that pollsters failed to proportionately represent Conservative voters because they did not design the research in a way that allowed access to hard to reach groups (Mellon and Prosser, 2017). Conservatives gained 331 seats, an additional 24 seats than GE10, but only attained a 0.8 per cent increase in vote share, which meant its total vote share was only 36.9 per cent (BBC News, 2015c). Consequently, the UK had a majority government that the vast majority of voters did not vote for.

⁷⁸ The Scottish voter turnout was 63.8 per cent in GE10 and 71.1 per cent in GE15 (UK Political Info, 2015). This is significantly higher than the UK average increase from 65.1 per cent to 66.1 per cent (ibid). Arguably the increase was due to greater diversity between parties (Dorling, 2016b). This argument is supported by the higher voter turnout in the General Election 2017 than in GE15 (see BBC News, 2017a)

⁷⁹ The SNP attained an increase of 50 seats from GE10 and an increase in vote share of 30 per cent from GE10 (BBC News, 2010b; BBC News, 2015c). The swing from Labour was a 30 per cent average across Scotland and a 39.3 swing in Glasgow North East (Macwhirter, 2015).

resolution’, the reduction in the three Westminster parties’ vote share and support for challenges suggest there was a significant public desire for change and therefore dissatisfaction with the Westminster ‘resolution’.

Façade of Major Difference: Debating Neoliberal Variations

Westminster definers continued to construct a façade of *difference*, *opposition* between their parties and represented the choice between them as a *major* public decision despite conflict actually being contained within narrow ideological and discursive boundaries. Definers spoke of opposites and clashes (see Cameron, 2015b; Miliband, 2015a), and described choices as “stark” (Clegg, 2015a) “clear” (Hague, 2015), “fundamental” (Clegg in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015), “big” (Miliband, in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) and generation defining (see Cameron, 2015c; Miliband, 2015b). Liberal Democrats constructed Labour and Conservatives as at opposite ends of the political spectrum and themselves in the centre and therefore able to restrain, through a coalition, the other parties from their *extreme* positions and provide balance (see Clegg, 2015b). Clegg frequently used the term “lurch” to describe Labour and Conservatives’ political positions if his party were not required to form a coalition (see Clegg, 2015c).

Image Two: Scales from Liberal Democrats (2015)



Cameron, Miliband and Clegg all supported the Charter for Budget Responsibility, ensuring austerity and restrained capital investment, in the House of Commons (see HM Treasury, Alexander and Osborne, 2014; HM Treasury, 2015). The alternative of spending to encourage economic growth and reduce debt continued to be excluded. Again the *pace and depth*⁸⁰ of austerity, and not its necessity or desirability, were debated. Danny Alexander (2015a), Chief Secretary to the Treasury, criticised Labour for slowly spreading “the pain across the whole Parliament” because they committed to eradicating the structural deficit by 2020. He criticised Conservatives for inflicting a “rollercoaster” with a “big dip” in the first two years because they wanted to eradicate it by 2017-2018. In contrast, he argued, Liberal Democrats offered “a much smoother transition from rescue to recovery to renewal”. Labour and Liberal Democrats framed Conservatives’ as *ideologically* going ‘beyond the necessary’. Osborne’s “big ideological plan” (Balls, 2015a) was “extreme and fast” (Balls, 2015b). “Cameron wanted “to slash and burn” (Miliband in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) with “massive and...unnecessary” cuts “reflect[ing] more of an ideological desire to shrink the state” (Alexander, 2015c).

Similarly to GE10 constructions of other variations of austerity risking/ forfeiting recovery, they constructed a logic of difference between Conservatives and Labour’s variation of neoliberal ‘resolution’.

Table Three: General Election 2015 Conservatives’ Logic of Difference

Conservative led Government	Labour led Government
strong leadership and lower costs	weak and unstable leadership leading to higher costs
economic competence	economic chaos

⁸⁰ Cameron (in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015) proposed £13billion savings in government departments, “£12billion in welfare and £5billion from cracking down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance”. Labour’s plan involved: reinstatement of the 50p tax for those earning over £150,000; a reduction of spending outside priority areas including health and education; raising wages and living standards to increase tax revenues to aid in reducing the deficit; and no borrowing other than for investment (see Labour, 2015t; Miliband in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015). Labour would not commit to reversing the Coalition government’s cuts (see Wood in BBC Election Debate, 2015 and Miliband in BBC Election Debate, 2015). Liberal Democrats informed they would cut less than Conservatives and borrow less than Labour.

financially controlled lower taxes, paying down debt, no deficit and controlled welfare economy reviving	financial recklessness higher taxes, high debt, continued borrowing and over spending and uncontrolled welfare economy ruining
progress	juddering halt and going back to square one

Conservatives claimed: a Labour-SNP government would be “deeply unstable” (Osborne, 2015e) and “weak” because it would operate on a vote by vote, budget by budget basis” (Cameron, 2015h) and a party that wanted the UK to break up would be governing the UK (Cameron, 2015c). They also argued that a Labour-SNP government would risk the recovery, cause higher unemployment and household costs, lower wages, and therefore higher poverty and inequality (see Osborne, 2015e). They sought to provide authoritative legitimisation of these claims by drawing upon business leaders’ (Cameron in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) and “international investors and observers”⁸¹ statements (Osborne, 2015e). Their message was: if international banks are concerned then the British public should be, reinforcing the alignment of private and public interests. The international banks that had collapsed the global economy only seven years before were the ‘expert’ from whom guidance was to be sought.

At the core of the logic of difference was the claim that Conservatives offered “economic competence, with David Cameron as Prime Minister following through on our long-term economic plan” whereas Labour offered “economic chaos...with higher taxes, more debt and no plan to fix our public finances, create jobs or build a more secure economy” (Conservatives, 2015) causing a “juddering halt” to the plan, the economy, and therefore the country (Cameron, 2015c). This narrative contributed to framing Labour’s approach as fundamentally different from Conservatives and the attempt to obscure what was, in effect, close ideological alignment.

In GE10 the NHS was rarely on the agenda of issues that needed addressing. However, by GE15 it was a key issue. Concerns over the NHS’s funding, long-term affordability,

⁸¹The investors included CIBC, a Canadian commerce bank, Morgan Stanley, a US investment bank, Black Rock, and Deutsche bank, a German investment bank (see Osborne, 2015e).

the Health and Social Care Act 2012, waiting times, and Jeremy Hunt's infamous claim of the 'weekend effect', which was found to misrepresent evidence and be untrue (see Boseley, 2016), constructed the NHS as in need of rescue. Indeed, the NHS was actually in crisis because of political decisions to stagnate spending (Cooper, 2014). As Streeck (2014) recognises underfunding facilitates corporate plunder of public assets and services. For those desiring its privatisation it was expedient for the service to be perceived as overwhelmed by a crisis that required private capital as a remedy. Westminster definers blamed the false, but ideologically advantageous, 'cause' of Britain running out of money and therefore *not being able* to fund the NHS. The construction of private capital as the public's saviour, evident in 2010 and developing prominence over the course of crisis was applied to the NHS to justify the next step in the gradual opening up of the NHS to private capital⁸². To obscure elite enthusiasm for privatisation, definers portrayed it as *unfortunately necessary* and each sought to portray their respective parties as caring most about the NHS (see Balls, 2015b; Cameron, 2015a, b; Cameron, 2015 in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No 10, 2015; Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015; Cameron in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015; Hunt, 2015). Despite consensus around NHS privatisation, Westminster definers constructed their approaches as different but actually only debated its extent. Miliband (in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) spoke of a "tide of privatisation that is starting under David Cameron and is about to go much much further", but supported "limited privatisation" under Labour.

In sum, Westminster definers sought to limit mental horizons, focussing on the necessity of austerity and privatisation of the NHS by presenting debate within these limits. Consensus around their necessity was established and the debate was decisively positioned on neoliberal terrain.

Debating 'Causes' but Maintaining the Austerity Consensus

Conservatives', supported by Liberal Democrats, continued to blame the ideologically advantageous 'cause' of Labour's 'irresponsible' spending for the crisis (see Cameron in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015; Clegg in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015;

⁸² Firstly there was outsourcing of cleaning and other roles, then public-private partnerships, then private companies running GP surgeries and care being commissioned from private corporations (see El-Gingihy, 2015).

Conservatives, 2015). In continuation of their explicit attachment of Labour to economic problems Conservatives (2015) re-named the economic crisis “Labour’s Great Recession”. Cameron repeatedly read Byrne’s note, which became a powerful symbol of Labour’s financial irresponsibility and reinforced the exclusion of increasing public spending. Conservatives rehearsed the familiar logic of equivalence between Labour and financial irresponsibility, continued to subvert the reality that prior to the crisis Conservatives committed to Labour’s level of public spending⁸³, and continued to connect ‘responsible financial behaviour’ to austerity (see Osborne, 2015b). Conservatives operated to ensure the negative reputation of Labour continued to be applied under Miliband’s leadership⁸⁴. Clegg (in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) called on Miliband to say, “in front of the British people...I am sorry for crashing the British economy”.

Miliband (2015b) voiced pride in Labour’s public spending on education and healthcare disputing claims that overspending had caused the crisis. However, in direct response an interviewer stated, “you seem to be about the only person standing in this country which believes that to be the case”, and in Question Time: Election Leaders Special (2015), where Miliband also voiced pride, an audience member stated:

“how can you stand there and say that you didn’t overspend and end up bankrupting this country? That is absolutely ludicrous. You are frankly just lying...the fact speak for themselves. If I get to the end of the week and I can’t afford to buy a pint I have overspent”⁸⁵.

These quotes reflect the common sense status that the Conservatives’ blaming of Labour spending and consequently the response of austerity attained certainly for many in this period, or in Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992: 241) terminology, they became powerful “naturalised pre constructions”. It exposed Labour’s failure to counter this in the years up to 2015.

⁸³ However, Miliband (in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) highlighted it, for example: Cameron “you backed our spending plans until 2008”.

⁸⁴ This was particularly effective because Miliband had held a Cabinet position in Brown’s government.

⁸⁵ This comment indicates that the construction of national budgets as operating like household budgets had at least some success.

Labour explained that higher public spending was a *consequence* of the “global finance crisis” not the *cause* (see Miliband in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No 10, 2015). For Alexander (2015b), “the clue...[was] in the title, it was a global financial crisis”. Naming a crisis is a key political act because the name contains the crisis (Clarke and Newman, 2010; Gamble, 2009). Foucault’s theorisation of ‘problematization’ suggests that through a name the subject of concern is constructed in a way that limits the options for response (ibid). Labour portrayed the crisis as a global force that spread to Britain, which operated to obscure that the roots of the crisis were in a political economic order dominant in Britain, the US, and in other countries across the globe. Britain was not a victim only of external conditions.

Labour did give some recognition to the role deregulation of the banking industry had played⁸⁶. However, they positioned it as an innocent act, a mistake, and a result of a genuine belief that it was the right thing to do for the economy (see Miliband, in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015). They blamed their own ignorance and the ignorance of other ‘experts’ around the world in an attempt to exonerate themselves. They effectively claimed that those whose (extraordinarily well remunerated) jobs it was to hold knowledge of the financial system did not adequately understand it.

“What actually happened was, it wasn’t simply the Ministers, the politicians. The central bank governors, and the bank chief executives themselves didn’t know what was going on within their organisations and that caused huge problems around the world” (Balls in Ask the Chancellors, 2015).

In accordance with von Scheve et al’s (2016) categorisation, collective actors were constructed as acting in accordance with the best of their knowledge, therefore not acting immorally but simply making mistakes. Labour asserted that their actions were in accordance with global standard practice; they were not deviant but normal. Their excuse was ‘everybody else was doing it too’. Labour also highlighted that Conservatives had supported the deregulation of business, including of finance⁸⁷ (see

⁸⁶ For example see Miliband (2015b), which included intertextuality of the Conservative’s Permanent Secretary text for authoritarian legitimisation.

⁸⁷ Following the US Sarbanes Oxley Act 2002 Osborne (2006) warned that “London has benefited enormously from America’s short-sightedness and it would be foolish of us to make the same mistake”; Cameron (2008) stated:

Balls in Ask The Chancellors, 2015; Miliband, 2015 in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) to counter Conservatives' construction of Labour as irresponsible and Conservatives as responsible. Labour asserted that it had learnt its lesson and had already apologised. However, Labour were hampered by the timidity in their response to Conservatives' blame attribution and the truth about the causes of crisis could and should have been much more powerful. That is was not, was a very clear indicator of the limits of Labour's 'progressive' credentials.

Labour's advocated response suggests that it *had not* actually learnt from its 'mistakes'. 'Mistakes' continued to inform the crisis 'resolution' and new normality. As Streeck (2017a: 8) suggests, before the financial crisis 'experts' stated that regulation was not necessary to prevent bubbles and then after the crisis caused by deregulation the same 'expert' knowledge continued to inform the 'resolution' "as if nothing had" happened. The most direct concomitant response of Labour's blame discourse was an intensification of regulation. However, the party failed to provide a detailed explanation of how 'learning its lesson' would translate into effective regulation. Instead, like the Conservatives, Labour committed to cutting debt and deficit through austerity. For example: "what happened in our country was that we had a dramatic crisis in the banks, which led to a high deficit. And the question for the 2015 election...is how do we get that deficit down in a fair way" (Miliband, 2015b);

"the deficit didn't cause the financial crisis, the financial crisis caused the deficit, that's why President Obama is dealing with the deficit too. It wasn't because Labour invested in schools and hospitals in the UK, and look the question for now is getting that deficit down and balancing the books and that's what we're going to do" (Miliband, 2015c).

On the first page of its manifesto, even before the contents, was a "budget responsibility lock", which guaranteed:

"Labour's economic failure has been the excessive bureaucratic interventionism of the past decade too much tax, too much regulation, too little understanding of what our businesses need to compete in the modern world...government needs to do less taxing and regulating-we learnt that from the success of the 1980s...government can kill economic dynamism with excessive regulation and taxation".

“every policy in this manifesto is paid for. Not one commitment requires additional borrowing...A Labour government will cut the deficit every year...We will get national debt falling and a surplus on the current budget as soon as possible in the next parliament” (Labour, 2015).

In contrast to BTB’s portrayal in SIR14 of Labour as deeply protective of systems for social justice, and his personal expression of pride in Labour’s public spending, Miliband (in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) proudly declared “I am the first Labour leader...going into an election saying spending in key areas is going to fall that is because I am so determined...that we live within our means”. Balls (2015b) refused to commit to an additional £8billion investment in the NHS⁸⁸, which Osborne had committed to (see Osborne, 2015c), because Labour did not want to make “unfunded commitments”.

Yet again, Labour again failed to establish a significant difference between the Conservatives, and therefore was not fundamentally an opposition. Conservatives’ alignment of fiscal responsibility with austerity and discrediting of Labour meant that to appear credible Labour was again faced with the choice of countering the Conservatives’ narrative and committing to an anti-austerity resolution or presenting their party as most capable of delivering effective cuts. It again chose the latter, as evidenced in Ball’s (2015a) assertion that any party who was not committing to ‘balancing the books’ through austerity was “irresponsible”.

Despite conflicting over causes both parties advocated further austerity. Conservatives identified high public spending as a ‘cause’ to position a neoliberal response as the ‘resolution’, and diverted attention from real causes that had concomitant anti-neoliberal responses. Labour gave some attention to a neoliberal cause but their framing directed attention to a neoliberal response. Signifying the power of Conservatives blame attribution discourse, the parties competed to appear the most capable of cutting spending. In Giger and Nelson’s (2010: 1) terminology parties engaged in “credit claiming” for austerity to gain electoral support. Also reflecting the power of Conservative discourse, GE15 texts gave focus to public debt, deficit, and

⁸⁸ This was the amount Simon Stevens, Chief Executive Officer of the NHS stated was required in the following Parliamentary term (see Baker et al, 2015).

austerity and compared to GE10 significantly even less focus was given to the deregulation of the private sector.

Continuing Austerity as Economically Necessary

Notwithstanding the failings of austerity and evidence that economic conditions were unfavourable (see Wren-Lewis, 2015), in GE15 Westminster definers, most notably Conservatives continued to argue that austerity was economically necessary. They claimed cuts were *needed* and *had* to be made (see Cameron in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015). Johnson (in BBC Election 2015, 2015) referred to austerity as a “programme of economic common sense”, and for Miliband (2015d) they were “common sense spending reductions”. Cameron (2015d) highlighted that Labour, the official ‘oppositional’ party, also voted for a further “£30billion adjustment”. His message was, if our ‘opposition’ agrees it is necessary then it must not be a political choice. Obscuring ideological alignment was used to deny that austerity was still, a choice.

Westminster definers continued to emphasise the severity of the crisis. They used superlatives and metaphors of dangerous situations (see Cameron in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015; Osborne in Ask the Chancellors, 2015). The deficit was still “one of the higher budget deficits in the world” (Osborne, 2015b), which was framed as an argument for continued austerity, as opposed to the more logical ending of austerity. The crisis had been “an economic firestorm which could have engulfed this country” (Clegg in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015). Metaphors sought to construct the crisis as a natural phenomenon and obscure elite agency and responsibility. Clegg (in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) continued to compare Britain to Greece to cultivate concern about Britain’s fiscal position. Major differences between the UK and Greek case continued to be excluded. The comparison to a country in bad economic conditions that had been subjected to austerity by those advocating austerity was actually fundamentally illogical.

Conservative construction of national finances as working like household finances was key to justifying austerity. As Konzelmann (2014: 701) suggests, over its history “misleading analogies drawn between government budgets and the accounts of firms and households” have been key to narratives justifying austerity. Westminster definers

engaged in interdiscursivity drawing principles used when discussing household finances into discourses about national finances. The Labour government had ‘overspent’, there was no money left, so the only option was to cut back on reckless spending on unaffordable desirables and responsibly save. The rainy day metaphor, used to explain individuals and families putting aside money for an unexpected event or emergency, was applied to Britain’s finances. The moral of the metaphor (see Lakoff, 2016) is that responsible individuals save for crisis. For Conservatives, so too should the government (see Cameron, 2015a, e). To justify the continuation of austerity beyond crisis and to perhaps lay the discursive foundations for permanent austerity, Osborne (2014a) argued that cuts were needed in the long term to “fix the roof”, and produce a surplus or a rainy day pot to “protect Britain from future storm”. The public were told that they not only had to make sacrifices to recover Britain from this crisis but change had to be long term to build Britain’s “resilience” to future crisis (see Liberal Democrats, 2015). The origins of the crisis were inaccurately identified, and ‘our’ preparation for unforeseeable shocks through savings became the moralising focus, as opposed to the recklessness of high finance and its structural (and continuing) flaws. Consequently, austerity, not the transformation of financial regulation, corporate structure, or neoliberalism more widely, became the logical and responsible response. Reinforcing the irrationality of austerity as a crisis ‘resolution’, Konzelmann (2014: 728) argues comparing between government finances and household finances:

“is fundamentally flawed; and it is clearly misleading to promote the idea that when public deficits and debts are high – analogous to when households and firms have accumulated too much debt – it is necessary to suffer the ‘pain’ of austerity to eliminate them, with anything less being portrayed as fiscally irresponsible. This is because, first, unlike a private household or firm, a sovereign government that issues its own currency and has a floating exchange rate is not operationally constrained by its budget because it can both issue and adjust the value of its currency to manage a deficit. Second, whilst a household or firm can balance its budget by reducing spending and repaying its debts, a government cannot. During a slump, government deficits rise as a consequence of falling tax revenues and rising unemployment-related social costs, putting upward pressure on public debt levels at the same time as GDP growth is slowing. In this context, cutting public spending will not only deepen the slump it will also add to public debt”.

Misleadingly, Conservatives claimed austerity was *successfully* delivering recovery and therefore needed to be continued (see Cameron, 2015f; Cameron in Question

Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015). They sought to manufacture ignorance, or at best ambiguity, to its failings, as demonstrated in Cameron's (in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015) response to Paxman's questions:

Paxman: "How much money have you borrowed?"

Cameron: *"Well, we have cut the deficit in half as a share of GDP"*

Paxman: "But how much did you borrow?"

Cameron: *"The key thing is the amount of money you borrow every year. That's the deficit"*

Paxman: "Do you know what it is?"

Cameron: *"The deficit is down by half. We have borrowed a lot of money because the deficit adds to your debt every year"*

Paxman: "Do you know what the actual figure is?"

Cameron: *"You're going to tell me, Jeremy, presumably"*

Paxman: "I am. A mere £500billion"

Cameron: *"that is a lot less than previous government was borrowing"*

Paxman: "no it is more"

Cameron: *"the annual overdraft, the deficit, has come down by one half as a share of GDP and the debt as a share of our national income is now falling"*.

The latter comment was misleading⁸⁹. The discussion with Paxman implicitly confirmed the anti-austerity case. Reducing the deficit had come at the cost of shrinking economic activity and consequently increasing debt as a proportion of national product. Despite their five-year programme resulting in a halved, not eradicated, deficit, and the debt to GDP ratio increasing every year from 2010-2015, Conservatives celebrated their success (see Conservatives, 2015). They operated to protect the logic of equivalence they had created between Conservatism, fiscal responsibility, low borrowing⁹⁰, low spending, debt reduction, as well as the credibility of their plan for crisis 'resolution'. Conservatives claimed they had brought 'strength' to Britain (see Osborne in Ask the Chancellors, 2015) emphasising the 'success' of low unemployment (see Cameron, 2015a, g; Johnson, 2015). This sidestepped falling real wages and worsening employment conditions that in turn, contributed to low tax revenues (see Osborne, 2015d).

⁸⁹ Full Fact (2015) informed that debt rose under the Coalition "from £960billion in April 2010...to £1.5 trillion", just over a 50 per cent increase, and as a proportion of GDP the value changed "from 62 per cent in April 2010 to 81 per cent in April 2015".

⁹⁰ The framing of Labour governments as borrowing too much and not 'fixing the roof' obscures the fact that Conservative governments on average borrow more and repay back less (see Murphy, 2016).

Conservatives argued that the recovery job had been started but was incomplete and sought to cultivate concern about wasting sacrifices already made and forfeiting economic stability if austerity was not continued (see Cameron, 2015c, f; Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015; Osborne, 2015b, d).

“We have not finished the work. That is why I am so keen to do another five years...I am not saying we fixed it, it takes a long time to fix the mess that I was left to clear up...we are half way through a building job” (Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015).

Conservatives used the metaphors of a building construction and a road journey⁹¹ to encourage the public make sense of austerity with the questions why turn back when you have come so far? Why not complete a building project? Why sacrifice and work hard and not collect the reward? They argued that if their job were not finished, and even if Labour’s austerity plan was implemented, Britain would be exposed to threats (see Conservatives, 2015; Osborne in Ask the Chancellors, 2015).

In January 2015 Greece elected Syriza⁹² a party committing to ending austerity and responding to its humanitarian crisis (see Henley, 2015). British media reporting of the election contributed to public awareness of a country suffering austerity being offered an alternative. A fortnight later, Sturgeon launched the SNP’s GE15 anti-austerity campaign. Westminster definers sought to discredit the idea of alternatives to austerity. In contrast to previous claims of similarity, Osborne (2015f) claimed there was a “striking contrast” between Greece and Britain, although he continued not to recognise the economic power and freedom that Britain had that Greece did not. He drew attention to Greece’s high unemployment rate and shrinking economy to argue that Greece was in a different economic position from the UK and that was why it was seeking an alternative (ibid). Second, he stated that an alternative was only required when economic plans were failing and asserted Britain’s plan was not (see Osborne, 2015f). Despite the slowest recovery from recession for over a century, throughout his budgets Osborne also insisted that his austerity plan was successful and needed to be continued. He defined austerity as working because at long last, there was some growth

⁹¹ A key Conservative poster of the GE15 campaign pictured a road to a stronger economy that Britain had already begun to travel down.

⁹² Syriza formed a Coalition government with a populist right wing party called Independent Greeks.

and high employment. He excluded other measures to the contrary, such as debt and deficit levels, falling real wages and living standards and the harms of hunger, homelessness, and child poverty. He also excluded that growth was in spite of austerity and failed to recognise the roles other strategies, such as the sale of national assets and quantitative easing had played.

Osborne (2011) asserted austerity was protecting UK credibility. However, Wren-Lewis (2015) argues that the Bank of England's buying of large amounts of UK debt protected credibility. Between 2010 and 2012 Osborne imposed severe austerity as his emergency budget set out. However, after two years, growth and tax revenues were dramatically lower than Osborne expected and evidence mounted that, in line with many predictions, austerity had severely hampered recovery (ibid). In 2012 Osborne deviated from his plan. "The coalition essentially stopped imposing new austerity measures" (Krugman, 2015). As a result the recovery began in 2013 (Krugman, 2015; Wren-Lewis, 2015). However, Osborne discursively supported the continuation of his plan obscuring what was, in effect, a dramatic U-turn. In 2013, in contrast to Westminster's claims that austerity would protect Britain's credibility, and notwithstanding the emphasis placed on protecting Britain's brand through austerity, Moody reduced the UK's rating because of poor growth expectations. Responding to this news, Osborne (BBC News, 2013a) maintained, "far from weakening our resolve to deliver our economic recovery plan, this decision redoubles it".

Given the record of the Coalition's austerity approach, it would have been rational for Osborne to advocate a different approach for the next parliament (Wren-Lewis, 2015). However, it would have been an admission of a calamitous 'error' and perhaps highlighted austerity's ideological character. This would have undermined the pursuit of consent for future austerity. Unsurprisingly, therefore, in the 2015 budget Osborne (2015a) heavily emphasised the success of his plan providing several darkness to light comparisons contrasting 2010 to 2015:

"five years ago, the deficit was out of control. Today, as a share of national income, it is down by more than a half. Five years ago, they were bailing out the banks. Today I can tell the House that we are selling more bank shares and getting taxpayers' money back. We set out a plan, that plan is working, and Britain is walking tall again".

In line with Proctor's (2008) argument, definers simply reasserted false assurances and sought to cast doubt on emerging evidence.

Austerity as Morally Imperative

Claims of intergenerational fairness to justify austerity, which were identified by Burchardt (2011) in texts disseminated in 2010, were also evident in GE15. "Failing to control our debt", Conservatives (2015) argued, "would be a moral failing...[towards] our children and grandchildren". Cameron (2015c) stated:

"we are not trying to cut the deficit because we are demented accountants obsessed by numbers, we're doing it because we want to come home at night, look at our children in the eye and say this generation did the right thing".

As in SIR14 INM, this justification powerfully harnessed the social value of children to a neoliberal response. Ironically, references to the next generation's interests were used to gain acceptance of responses that evidence shows directly harmed the next generation. No deficit and low debt are not necessarily in the next generations' interests because borrowing to invest is necessary for a prosperous future that provides for, and protects, the next generation (Burchardt, 2011). Modest inflation diminishes the value of debt over time.

"There is little advantage to having low public debt if you will not be able to be treated when you are sick, housed when you are homeless, or, less dramatically but no less importantly, unable to make a living because the basic services on which the economy depends are dilapidated, understaffed and under-skilled" (ibid: 8).

Continuing with austerity was framed as a means of rewarding 'the moral' and 'deserving' and therefore morally imperative. Conservatives claimed that following sacrifice British 'hard workers' would be able to bask in the 'good life', a construction underpinned by a neo-conservative moral evaluation. Those who 'worked hard' would be able to own a home of their own, have a "proper" job, good education for their children, and "a good and secure retirement" (Cameron, 2015f). However, if other variations of austerity were taken (never mind an anti-austerity alternative), the reward would not be forthcoming.

Patriotism was also invoked to legitimise continued ‘austerity’. It was argued that British people would fulfil their moral duty to sacrifice for their country, through hard work for low pay and enduring austerity, and as a result Britain would be able to stand tall and enjoy international glory again (see Cameron, 2015f; Cameron in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). Clegg’s comparison of the UK to Greece portrayed British people as, unlike Greeks, *capable* of undertaking necessary austerity in the interests of their country. In his 2012 budget Osborne (2012) stated:

“no people will strive as the British will strive. No country will adapt as the British will adapt. No country will value those who work, as we will value those who work. Together, the British people will share in the effort and share the rewards. This country borrowed its way into trouble; now we are going to earn our way out”.

Reinforcing the ‘success’ of his plan, Osborne (2015a) announced “from the depths Britain is returning...Britain: on the rise. This is the Budget for Britain, the come-back country” and argued it would be a full “national recovery”.

“Britain has lived its long life as an exemplary country...and we are on the brink of being that country once again. We can be the country that not only lives within its means and pays its way, but that offers a good life to those who work hard and do the right thing...with a strengthening economy behind us–this *buccaneering*, world-beating, can-do country–we can do it all over again...this is a great country and we can be greater still” (Cameron, 2015f, emphasis added).

Buccaneering is used here to suggest boldness and enterprise, but it has another, more literal meaning that is perhaps more accurate - ruthless plundering! Conservatives and Liberal Democrats drew upon the social image of Britain as a country that works hard, sacrifices, and is self-disciplined for national and personal goals (see Hall et al, 1978). This was a clear example of Mathiesen’s (2004: vi) argument that “appeals to patriotism and duty to the nation” are used to quell criticism and resistance to harmful practices.

Cameron’s pro-austerity message was: sacrifice for your country; get up, go to work, accept less pay; get your head down and get on with the job; workers pull together to get Britain through; there is not long to go now; you have done well so far but keep going. He promised: your struggle will be rewarded by the resurrection of Great Britain, being Great British – at a time when Britain will symbolise to the world

discipline, respect, pride, and success, and by the luxuries of the good life - your children's education, your own house, and a good job. These rewards will symbolise the battle you have fought and when you get old you can sit back comfortable in your armchair, with pride and dignity, and say this is the Britain I worked hard and sacrificed for.

Sacrifice as (Un)Fairly Shared

Conservatives' construction of the crisis as the result of the *irresponsibility of a generation* sought to legitimise the spreading of sacrifice beyond a few into a supposedly 'universal' punishment and shared burden. In Nils Christie's (1981) words, the public were 'non-ideal victims'. They were not wholly innocent rather their behaviour had played a key role in their victimisation. As Tombs (2016a: 58) suggests "we were all somehow personally responsible for borrowing too much". The message was that if someone bought what was mis-sold to them, they played their part in the deviancy and would have to share the punishment with the fraudster. "The ubiquity of blame" was key to legitimising austerity (ibid: 59). Sharing austerity amongst the generation then, became the *fair* response to crisis, as opposed to an injustice.

Whilst shared sacrifice may be claimed to prevent a *perception* of injustice, history shows the "politically and economically weak" are almost always burdened with the sacrifices (Edelman, 1977: 44). Westminster definers claimed that those with the broadest shoulders would make the biggest contribution and the most vulnerable would be protected; sacrifice would be distributed proportionate to wealth (see Balls, 2015b; Cameron, 2015c; Clegg, 2015b; Clegg in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015; Clegg in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). Whilst the wealthiest may have made the greatest contribution in monetary terms (although the wealth of the very richest has also increased dramatically) evidence suggests they did not shoulder the biggest burden because sacrifices were not proportionate to wealth. Empirical evidence on the distribution of austerity over the 2010-2015 parliamentary term shows those with the narrowest shoulders carried the heaviest burden (see Lupton et al, 2015). So whilst statements such as "the top 20% have paid more than the remaining 80 percent put together" (Cameron in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) may have elements of truth it is also misleading. First the tax take from the wealthy is high because of inequality (because they are so wealthy). Second, the bottom fifth has paid

more in tax as a proportion of their income than those at the top. This has increased because of regressive taxation.

The broadest shoulders claim is “closely associated with Rawls...maxim principle” which requires that “priority be given to the worst off” (Burchardt, 2011: 9). Rawls’ (2001: 97) dictates: “identify the worst outcome of each available alternative and then adopt the alternative whose worst outcome is better than the worst outcomes of all the other alternatives”. The burden placed on the vulnerable led to a range of harms, including death, whereas the worst outcome of taxing rich individuals or corporations more would have been luxuries curtailed or corporations re-domiciling. However, welfare benefit reductions, intensified conditionality, and low pay demonstrate that elites prioritise the interests of private capital. Discourses aligning private and public interests however, argue that burdens on corporations also harm workers seeking to obscure that it serves private and *not* public interests.

To the extent that Osborne (2015d) also recognised the unfair distribution of harm, he attempted to excuse it by naturalising harm infliction on the vulnerable in a crisis:

“the poorest in society and the young in society suffer most when the economy fails. They are the first victims of failure of economic policy and they paid a very heavy price for the mistakes that led to the great recession”.

Naturalisation of sacrifice may be useful for seeking to maintain hegemony despite disastrous harm. More honestly, Miliband (in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) recognised that some vulnerable people suffer more than others because of “unfair choices” by a “Conservative Prime Minister”.

Legitimising Inequality: The Importance of Competition, Individual Responsibility, and Meritocracy

Neoliberals construct competition, and its connected moral principles of individual responsibility and meritocracy, as morally right (Amable, 2011). Individuals must compete to attain work and wealth in a free and fair competition and must bear the consequences of their actions (ibid). Poverty and inequality are understood as the consequences of individuals’ moral failings, incapability, and absence of self-

discipline and therefore as natural and fair outcomes of the meritocratic market. The state then, should not interfere in the system, as it would hinder ‘fairness’.

Whilst rules of the competition supposedly apply to all, they are applied differentially. The rich overwhelmingly ‘earn’ their money through speculation, appreciation or inflation of assets, ownership and rent, profit dividends, and through inheritances. Those lower down the class hierarchy are told that they must *work hard* to earn their reward, which is significantly lower than that gifted to the rich. As discussed in chapter five, whereas the banker is a rational actor who will only work for incentives, deeply moralised discourses claim those lower down the hierarchy must work for the good of their country and out of moral duty to their fellow citizens.

Upholding this skewed meritocracy, the public were told that bankers must be rewarded for their skills. Aligning with Hester, former CEO of RBS (see Shorthose, 2011), McEwan (2015) argued that bonuses were necessary to attract and reward highly skilled people who are able to reform the bank for the public. Rewarding bankers because they are able to resolve the crisis for the public contradicts discourses claiming that financial elites did not have the expertise to prevent or predict a crisis (Sandel, 2009). If a bank’s condition is the result of bankers’ actions, therefore they deserve bonuses, then it would follow that they must endure sacrifices for failings (ibid). However, it appears that bankers’ agency changes depending on whether discourses are determining causes of the crisis or legitimising continued remuneration. Notwithstanding their “self-professed ignorance” (Barton et al, forthcoming) and inability to prevent crisis, extravagant remuneration for financiers was maintained: “pay was high when performance was good, and pay was high when performance was bad” (Stiglitz, 2012: 99). The principle of meritocracy was partially applied to protect bankers’ remuneration whatever their performance in the competition. Whilst those lower down the hierarchy must endure the negative consequences of their immoral actions, to the extent of sanctions taking away the basics necessary for living, the negative consequences of bankers’ ‘immoral’ actions were socialised.

To maintain public satisfaction however, workers must not perceive the “chaos of reward” (Young, 1999: 9). Dissatisfaction and resentment may be generated “if the spectators are seen to consume free hand-outs without competing” and “the privileged

are seen as part of a ‘winner takes all’ culture, where prizes are doled out without thought of justification or merit” (ibid: 9). As both material expectations and “material uncertainty” have increased under neoliberalism there has developed “a widespread sense of demands frustrated and desires unmet” (ibid: 1). Those experiencing relative deprivation “gaze upwards” to those privileged with undeserved rewards but they also “gaze downwards” towards the ‘idle’ unemployed in “dismay at the relative wellbeing of those who although below are on the social hierarchy are perceived as unfairly advantaged; they make too easy a living even if it’s not as good as one’s own” (ibid: 9). To protect hegemony and legitimise neoliberal changes to welfare, Westminster definers directed frustration downwards; undeserved rewards of the idle would be removed and they would be re-moralised in the interests of the country and the ‘hard-working taxpayer’.

Notwithstanding increasing numbers of working people requiring food banks due to low and stagnant wages, Conservatives framed work as the way out of poverty (see Cameron, 2015e, f; Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015). In response to an interviewer highlighting that food banks increased from 66 in May 2010 to 421 in March 2015, Cameron (in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015) stated “usage increased”, which *implicitly* denied that need had increased, and he elaborated by suggesting this was:

“partly because the difficulties we face as a country. It is also because we changed the rules. The previous government didn’t allow job centres to advertise the existence of food banks. They thought it would be bad PR”.

The harms of coalition policies were denied. Cameron (in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) insisted, “I don’t want anyone to have to rely on a food bank in our country...the most important thing we can do is get more people into work, that is the best route out of poverty”. Individuals, Liberal Democrats (2015) stated, should ensure their own resilience to their financial crisis and poverty by saving for a rainy day. Attention was directed away from state and corporate responsibility for poverty and, rather than a reflection of state failure their existence was framed as a result of individual failure. Conservatives sought to obscure the widespread reality that for millions, working was not a route out of poverty.

Conservatives argued that all were given the *opportunity* to compete and fulfil their potential and emphasised the numbers of jobs they had generated once again ignoring the problem of in work poverty and drawing upon a myth of equal opportunity (see Cameron, 2015e; Conservatives, 2015). This construction was important for framing 'worklessness' as a choice informed by morality rather than structure. Concerningly, trend analysis suggests it became “increasingly likely” for the public to blame “individual characteristics “as opposed to “societal issues” for poverty (Rae, 2013).

Labour, for their part, again failed to fundamentally challenge Conservatives and also supported neoliberal rhetoric. It did not question the assertions that people needed to work harder and sacrifice more and welfare claimants needed discipline, whilst the rich meanwhile were just rich and should be allowed to get richer. They did however argue that the Coalition’s approach was not providing opportunities and reward, evidencing: low pay and in work poverty, insecure jobs, lack of full time roles and graduate jobs, and fixed and zero hours contracts (see Labour, 2015; Miliband in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015).

Extraordinarily, welfare claimants, not financial elites, were framed as cheating their way to ‘undeserved lifestyles’ at the expense of ‘the hard-working’. Claims of excessive welfare benefit incomes (see Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) and deeply moralised constructions of benefit claimants *unashamedly* cheating the system, and over representation of both, were prevalent in Westminster discourse, and also in the media (Barton and Davis, 2016). Conservatives spoke of families receiving tens of thousands in welfare benefits per year (but did not voluntarily specify the low number of families generating the perception the issue was more prevalent) to legitimise a cap on welfare benefits per household (see Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015). The £100,000 incomes of less than five families (see Staff Reporter, 2013) were utilised to gain support for a policy change that has affected tens of thousands of people. Prior to the election, the cap was put at £26,000, the average income of a working family. In the 2015 Conservative manifesto a reduction to £23,000 was proposed but following the election Osborne informed it would actually be £20,000 outside London (see Syal, 2015a), further evidence of the strategy of gradually, selectively, disseminating news.

Conservatives constructed a reciprocal relationship between citizens in which ‘the workless’ were constructed as not meeting their obligations to ‘hard-working taxpayers’ (see Cameron in Hansard, 2015b; Conservatives, 2015). Rather than welfare benefits being constructed as necessary entitlements for those in need, they were constructed as a vehicle for ‘the immoral’ to exploit ‘the moral’. ‘The workless’ were also constructed as unpatriotic (see Miliband in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015). Those who were not part of ‘alarm clock Britain’, who did not get up and work hard for their country (excluding the rich) were framed as immoral and as burdening ‘the hard-working’. Comparatively little, and certainly disproportionate, attention was given to the wealthy’s fraudulent activity and victimisation of ‘the hard-working’, despite the DWP (2014) recognition that benefit fraud only costs the UK around £1.2bn, and HMRC recognition that uncollected taxes, including from tax evasion and avoidance, costs £34bn (see Full Fact, 2016).

From 2013 the media engaged in “poor shaming” and constructing claimants as the “shameless poor” (Barton and Davis, 2016: 2, 13). “Where poverty is represented as *shameless*, or even as defiant or proud, empathy will be diminished” (ibid: 13). “The greatest vitriol is saved for those who are...unembarrassed, unapologetic, or seemingly content with their lot” (ibid: 13). They were portrayed as barefaced in their immorality. This construction sought to generate resentment, reduce empathy and perceptions of collectivism in order to attain support for a ‘punitive welfare’ system, or in other words to generate authoritarian populism. Conservatives told ‘the hard-working’ that the ‘immorality’ of the ‘workless’ at their expense would no longer go unpunished, allowing the state to rollback support and social responsibility.

Baumberg et al’s (2012) research on welfare benefits and stigma has shown that public perceptions of deserving and undeserving claimants are based on judgements about the extent of an individual’s responsibility for their situation and perceptions of ‘undeservedness’ had increased over the last 20 years. It also shows public overestimations of benefit fraud and a link between negative portrayals of claimants and stigma. There is also evidence that as a consequence of stigma some people are not claiming welfare benefits and that claimants’ perceptions of self-worth have been negatively affected. These findings are supported by research published in 2016, which found that:

“three-quarters of people who rely on working age benefits say they feel shame about claiming, either sometimes, most or all the time. Not only that, but two thirds of people in work agree that claimants should feel that way” (Hannah, 2016).

Estimates using DWP data suggest between £10billion to £15billion of benefits are not claimed (ibid). Not claiming can lead to financial/economic harms and emotional and psychological harm. However, despite the figures being much higher, Westminster gave emphasis to benefit fraud not unclaimed benefits. Whilst the state polices benefit fraud, encouraging clients to claim is largely a task left to charities.

Neoliberals succeeded in reconstructing the welfare state as workfare. For them, recipients must develop their employability and work to earn their right to welfare benefit (Amable, 2011). The system shifted from one delivering entitlements to the vulnerable for protection from structurally generated conditions to a system for re-moralisation of the immoral, ‘helping’ individuals to make ‘better choices’ to ‘improve’ their own lives (Amable, 2011; for an example see Duncan Smith, 2015a). The welfare claimant must show evidence of trying to work for their fellow citizens and country.

“If you want to claim unemployment benefit quite rightly now you have to fill in a CV, make yourself available for work, you have to attend job interviews. In the past before I became Prime Minister it was perfectly possible to sign on and really do very little to show you want to get a job. That is the wrong values and the wrong system for our country” (Cameron, 2015e).

For those perceived by the state to be inactive, or not active enough to be deemed deserving of support, sanctions are given. For Davies (2016a: 330), Britain has shifted into a new phase of “punitive neoliberalism”, which operates with “an ethos of heavily moralised-as opposed to utilitarian – punishment”. Similarly, Albo and Fanelli (2014: 21) suggest that during the crisis there has been “a ‘hardening’ of the state and the characterisations of a new phase of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’”.

There were further attempts to frame workfare as a moral and compassionate pursuit of better lives and dignity for welfare claimants (see Liberal Democrats, 2015; Javid, 2015). Aligning with Sir Rhodes Boyson’s claims during Thatcherism, the welfare

state was destroying society's moral fibre and hindering moral growth. A 'reformed' welfare state would 'free' people from their immoral dependency and give value to their lives. A logic of equivalence was constructed between paid employment and dignity, and also between not working and indignity. Cameron (in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) declared "a life on welfare is no life at all, we want to give you a life in work". Somewhat ironically, he argued that a welfare state created to ensure quality of life for the vulnerable was hindering welfare claimants in living a valuable life, again demonstrating the neoliberal shifts in terrains of debate.

Conservatives extended their claims of providing opportunities to work (and the pursuit of dignity) to disabled persons in an attempt to legitimise planned cuts to disability benefits. They framed the inclusion of disabled persons in the competition, or in other words the taking away of the safety net, as part of a drive for equal opportunities, social inclusion, and social justice (see Conservatives, 2015). Whilst removing barriers to develop the freedom of disabled persons to *choose* to work is progressive, cuts to disability benefits coerce⁹³ work, render people dependent on others, or place them in deeper poverty. This framed regressive changes as progressive. For neoliberals, if disabled persons were given the opportunity to compete then they could be responsible for their income. If they chose not to take the opportunity then, in accordance with the rules of the competition, the state would have no requirement to intervene. In fact it would be unfair if it did. Perhaps believing they had done the necessary groundwork, in 2016 Conservatives announced planned cuts to Employment and Support Allowance for new claimants that are in the work related activity group to 'incentivise' work (see Gentleman, 2016), which was met with relatively little resistance. However, they later announced a reduction in Personal Independence Payments (PIP) for claimants using appliances (see McVeigh, 2016). This announcement caused greater resistance⁹⁴ because it was announced in a budget that

⁹³ For example, Conservatives (2015) stated, "if they [those with long term yet treatable conditions] refuse a recommended treatment, we will review whether their benefits should be reduced".

⁹⁴ Duncan Smith (2016) when resigning recognised that the targets set, and means for achieving them, could be viewed as political rather than economically necessary:

"I am unable to watch passively whilst certain policies are enacted in order to meet the fiscal self-imposed restraints that I believe are more and more

withdrew support from the disabled whilst giving a tax reduction to high earning taxpayers, highlighting the injustice of responses.

If the claims outlined above are believed and the construction internalised, an individual can be held responsible for their circumstances and government becomes absolved from responsibility for inequality and it actually becomes ‘fair’ (Amable, 2011). The ‘moral’, ‘noble’ and ‘normal’, the ‘hard-working’ are encouraged to believe that all have a chance, they work hard and others choose not to, therefore it would be unfair to redistribute reward to privilege ‘undeserving immoral’ others (Bauman, 1998). This can cultivate acceptance of, or even active support for, withdrawal of welfare benefits.

In a markedly different tone, however, Conservatives spoke of pensioners, as a collective who had *all* worked hard and therefore all deserved the reward of the ‘good life’ – security and dignity in retirement. Pensioners were the only age group whose income increased⁹⁵ (Belfield et al, 2015). Conservatives continued to protect their incomes⁹⁶ and consequently they were less exposed to harm⁹⁷, although cuts to services impacted on poorer pensioners. Conservatives (2015) and Liberal Democrats (2015) again drew upon intergenerational claims arguing that protection from cuts was a means to thank older people for building a country to be proud of. Conservatives argued that pensioners were not able to fully compete therefore they required immunity (Cameron, 2015e). If their meritocratic discourse had been applied to pensioners in the same way as workers they would have argued that their conditions in retirement were a result of their previous poor competitive performance. This is an interesting contrast to the treatment of *this* working generation who are expected to be capable of working until significantly older and with less state support. Conservatives

perceived as distinctly political rather than in the national economic interest”.

⁹⁵ It is important to note that in the UK 1 in 7 pensioners, 1.6 million or 14 per cent of pensioners live in poverty (Age UK, 2017).

⁹⁶ The only cut to pensions was an increase in the pension age which effected future pensioners, currently working people, which was justified with the argument it was morally preferable for pensioners to have “generous” incomes and people work longer (see Osborne, 2015g).

⁹⁷ Pensioners were significantly underrepresented in food bank use (Loopstra and Lalor, 2017) and are much less likely to be in relative poverty (see Full Fact, 2017) demonstrating the protection progressive social policies, or harm reduction systems, can have.

sought to justify not means testing fuel allowance, whilst means testing child benefit, and cutting benefits for the working age poor and disabled, by stating they did not want “old people struggling with their fuel bills” (Osborne in Ask the Chancellors, 2015). However, wealthy pensioners did not require an allowance to prevent them from struggling to pay for fuel whilst the poor, disabled, needed greater support. On resigning Iain Duncan Smith (2016) argued that it would have been fairer if the government had made some cuts to pensioners’ incomes and less cuts to others. Clearly, the differential response to this generation and different narrative was a strategy to achieve more votes as a greater proportion of retired people voted.

Struggling to be the Party of the ‘Hard-working’

Conservatives and Labour each competed to present their party as the party of the ‘hard-working’. Cameron (2015f) stated he was “in it for the people who live within the rules, who do the right thing, who set the alarm early in the morning, do the school run, clock in at work”. If Miliband (in BBC Election Debate, 2015) were Prime Minister he would “always put working families first because that is the way we succeed as a country”. Both manifestos explicitly claimed to be written for working people (see Cameron, 2015f; Miliband in Labour, 2015). In contrast, the Labour manifesto for the General Election 2017 was titled ‘For the Many, Not the Few’ (see Labour, 2017).

Westminster definers constructed their respective party’s tax policies as rewarding ‘hard-working taxpayers’ (see Cameron, 2015f; Cameron in Hansard, 2015b; Javid, 2015; Miliband in BBC Election Debate, 2015). Labour committed to tackling tax evasion and avoidance (see Labour, 2015; Miliband in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015) by ending unfair tax breaks for hedge funds (see Labour, 2015), UK residents use of tax havens (Miliband, 2015e), including non-domiciled status (see Miliband, 2015a), and introducing a review of the HMRC to ensure the rule of law was being upheld and harsher responses (see Balls, 2015c). In contrast, Labour claimed Conservatives tax policies served the interests of the rich few (see Balls, 2015d; Miliband, 2015c).

Conservatives rejected Labour’s claims (see Balls, 2015d; Leslie, 2015; Miliband, 2015a, e; Miliband in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) and insisted that *their* tax

policies served ‘hard workers’ interests (see Cameron, 2015c; Cameron in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015). They committed to reducing workers taxes⁹⁸ and framed Labour as taking from the workers’ wallets to spend on unreformed welfare for the ‘undeserving’ (see Cameron, 2015e; Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015; Conservatives, 2015). Conservatives constructed welfare cuts and low taxes as being in workers’ interests. They sought to disconnect income taxes from public spending on social justice measures that support workers’ and their families, including welfare benefits.

“The value of public spending is routinely ignored, underplayed or simply forgotten in our tax and spending debates. Anti-tax campaigners, the tabloid press and right-wing critics of public services all talk about tax revenues as if they were taken and thrown into the sea. Tax cuts are touted as if they have no consequences for public services” (Horton and Reed, 2010: 13).

Conservatives claimed they had a world-leading reputation for ensuring corporations pay their taxes (see Cameron, 2015e). This conflicted with a number of revelations around this moment⁹⁹. As the HSBC scandal unfolded during the GE15 campaign, Conservatives were committing to preventing tax evasion and avoidance whilst simultaneously justifying their failure to act. They claimed ignorance to exonerate themselves and others, an inability to influence the criminal justice response despite failing to previously create necessary legislation, and took a forward looking approach to managing tax seeking to deflect attention from past cases. Similarly, Liberal Democrats proposed a law for the future criminalisation of banks, accountants, and lawyers who facilitated tax evasion (see Alexander, 2015d).

In a period when the public were told that sacrifices were required to reduce the dangerous deficit, the Coalition government significantly reduced corporation tax. It was 28 percent in 2010 and is currently set to be 17 percent by 2020. Each year the

⁹⁸ Liberal Democrats also committed to not increasing taxes for the hard-working on low and middle incomes, and tackling tax avoidance (see Liberal Democrats, 2015). They also proposed a High Value Property Levy, which was their version of Labour’s mansion tax.

⁹⁹ In 2013 it was revealed the HMRC made sweetheart tax deals with large corporations resulting in billions of pounds of losses in tax receipts (see Syal 2013). In 2015 it became public knowledge that the Swiss arm of the HSBC routinely facilitated tax avoidance (see Leigh et al, 2015). In 2016 Panama papers emerged, which revealed David Cameron benefitted from a tax avoiding offshore fund and had owned shares in a fund that he sold before becoming Prime Minister (Booth et al, 2016).

rate was gradually reduced, and it was always by slightly more than forecast the previous year. The strengthening of the construction of private capital as the saviour of the public from crisis and the gradual delivering of further cuts were strategies for gaining public acceptance.

Whilst Labour and Conservatives professed to be led by the interests of the ‘hard-working’, responses and proposed responses contradicted their claims. Instead they served private capital and rolled back state social responsibility. In addition to cutting corporation tax, they reduced welfare support, failed to adequately fund the NHS and facilitated its privatisation, as well as supporting the opening up of other public assets and services to capital despite evidence showing that this costs the public. They insisted ‘hard-working taxpayers’ need to work harder and sacrifice more, but excluded the alternatives of fiscal stimulus, or significantly increasing tax on the wealthy. Neither party adequately addressed tax evasion and avoidance whilst in power. They supported deregulation of private capital and failed to plan or undertake fundamental reform of the finance industry despite the harms inflicted by it leaving ‘hard-working taxpayers’ still vulnerable to carrying the costs of bailout again. Conservatives have also reduced the power of workers to resist. However, definers’ alignment of private and public interests and the exclusion of alternatives to austerity sought to propound the fallacy that ‘hard-working’ taxpayers’ interests were determining these policies.

Manufacturing Ignorance to Maintain Acceptance of Austerity

Strategies for ignorance manufacture were key, particularly for Conservatives, in seeking to gain acceptance of welfare benefit cuts. Conservatives planned to change the definition of child poverty to allow for more favourable statistics (see Cameron, 2015i) obscuring the effect of welfare cuts (see Gentleman, 2015). Notably, parties committed themselves to welfare cuts but did not tell the public *where* they would fall. Conservatives in particular were heavily critiqued for not being transparent about where £12billion of welfare cuts would be made (see Alexander, 2015e; Sturgeon in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). In response to direct questions from other Westminster definers, media presenters, and interviewers, Conservatives repeated a number of discursive responses that maintained public ignorance, which included: repeating their commitment to £12billion of welfare cuts (Cameron, 2015a; Duncan

Smith, 2015b; Osborne, 2015b) stating where £2billion would fall but not the other £10billion (Cameron in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015), claiming they had yet to decide where cuts would fall (see Duncan Smith, 2015b), arguing that Labour were withholding *more* plans (see Cameron, 2015d), and stating that the cuts were merely a continuation of cuts when they were additional (see Osborne, 2015g). Osborne (2015g) effectively stated ‘trust me I am a Tory Chancellor – I will find cuts’. Cameron also identified unfavourable alternatives to cuts such as raising taxes, which aligned with the negative framing of taxing and public spending (see Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015; Cameron in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). Conservatives strategically chose not to disclose planned disability benefit cuts until after the election.

Liberal Democrats strategically made publicly available a DWP proposal to cut child benefit and child tax credits and suggested that it might have been a Conservative plan for future cuts (see Clegg in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015). Cameron (in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) responded by denying that child tax credit would be cut but again did not identify where cuts would fall. Ignorance was strategically manufactured about cuts, deliberately preventing the public from making an informed choice on Election Day.

Pushing Banking ‘Reform’ Down the Agenda

With the effects of, and responses to, a crisis triggered by financial crisis still dominating both political and economic debate and negatively affecting lives, it might appear surprising that the financial industry was not a key issue in televised debates and minimal attention moreover, was given to it in manifestos¹⁰⁰. The reform focussing moment that existed in the early stages of the crisis did not continue into this INM. Westminster definers had successfully ensured the transfer of calls for reform and intensified regulation from finance to welfare and now immigration. They had successfully socialised blame downwards and protected the financial sector.

¹⁰⁰ Labour dedicated two thirds of a single page of their manifesto to banking reform, in contrast debt and deficit were afforded a full page even before the contents and the topic ran throughout the first half of the manifesto. Liberal Democrats had one page in their manifesto devoted to summarising their plans for banks whereas debt and deficit was the topic of a whole section. In the Conservative manifesto, debt and deficit ran throughout whole sections and there was only half a page dedicated to plans for reforming the bank system.

Definers continued to exclude the alternative of permanent nationalisation of banks from debate, arguing that re-privatisation was necessary to aid the repayment of public debt and ensure competition (see Conservatives, 2015; Osborne, 2015h). Shortly after the election Osborne sold the first tranche of RBS shares for a loss of £1billion with 60 percent of the shares being purchased by hedge funds (see Treanor, 2015a). The suggestion in GE10 that shares would be re-sold to Cameron's 'friends' in the City was accurate. Following seven years of losses, no public dividend but bonuses for bankers, the government sold the bank at a *loss* back into private hands, who will reap future dividends and sale profits after the bank recovers. In his statement accompanying the first sale, Osborne could not justify the loss in terms of value for taxpayers. He argued instead that:

“the right thing to do for the taxpayer and for British businesses: it will promote financial stability, lead to a more competitive banking sector, and support the interests of the wider economy. Now is the time for RBS to rebuild itself as a commercial bank, no longer reliant on the state, but serving the working people of Britain” (Osborne, 2015h).

Whilst Westminster parties gave lip service to the need for greater competition in the banking sector, in the form of challenger banks or regional banks, and a lower threshold on market share to prevent an oligopoly where banks are 'too big to fail' (see Conservatives, 2015; Labour, 2015; Liberal Democrats, 2015) and made lacklustre statements supporting economic diversification (see Miliband in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015; Osborne, 2015e), significant change addressing the power and centrality of finance is yet to materialise (Tombs, 2016a).

Being Friendlier with Private Capital

Westminster definers continued to argue that corporate success was key to resolving the crisis. Therefore, Britain needed to be increasingly 'business friendly' (see Conservatives, 2015; Liberal Democrats, 2015), which translated to the continuance and intensification of neoliberal conditions. Echoing trickle-down theory, Osborne (in Ask the Chancellors' 2015) claimed that corporate success would resolve the crisis even for the poorest:

“when your economy crashes, the people who suffer are precisely...the poorest...and the way you can help is by running an economy that is stable, that is growing, that is investing, that is creating jobs, where business is expanding, that is the best possible answer”.

Again, Osborne (2015e) explicitly aligned corporate interests and public interests. This mapping of corporate interests onto public interests is a clear example of the hegemonic status that neoliberalism had achieved. This construction has gained further momentum in the Brexit INM where Conservatives are claiming that the UK must become a corporate tax haven in order to attract private capital *for all our sakes*.

Further deregulation, corporate tax cuts, and reduced trade union power continued to be framed as the path to ‘resolution’ rather than the restoration of the factors that had generated crisis in the first place. Javid (2015) declared that “free enterprise” was “the lifeblood of any successful economy” and that “creating more jobs, boosting growth, greater investment in our economy...[required] free enterprise and...more deregulation”. Attention was directed away from the alternative of public sector investment and the dangerousness of deregulation. Liberal Democrats (2015) also pledged a ‘business’ focused regulatory approach. This was all possible because definers had successfully blamed Labour public spending for the crisis. The private sector, liberated by ‘business friendly’ conditions, became the logical ‘resolution’.

Again Conservatives utilised a crisis to reduce labour rights. Actualising Conservatives’ GE10 commitment, The Trade Union Bill proposed the following rollbacks:

“in terms of strike laws that there will be some considerable changes, we have said there will be a minimum threshold in terms of turnout of 50% of those entitled to vote, we have also said that when it comes to essential public services, at least 40% of people need to vote for strike action, and we have said we are going to lift the ban on the use of agency staff when strike action takes place” (Javid, 2015).

Minimum thresholds reduce the viability of a strike, and protection from disruption undermines the effectiveness of protest. Conservatives (2015) described a ban on hiring agency staff, which facilitates disruption and therefore effectiveness of protest, as “nonsensical”.

Extraordinarily, protection from trade union power, rather than financial power, was constructed as being in the public's interest in order to legitimise neoliberal responses.

“We will protect you from disruptive and undemocratic strike action...This turnout threshold will be an important and fair step to rebalance the interests of employers, employees, the public and the rights of trade unions” (Conservatives, 2015).

In sum, depressed real wages, deregulation of finance, and cutting welfare all played causal roles in either the origins or the amplification of the crisis of 2007-2008 but for Westminster maintaining and intensifying these causes was the way to ‘resolve’ the crisis.

The Three-Party Anti-Austerity Challenge

Anticipation of a hung Parliament¹⁰¹ and strong polling for smaller parties meant that the latter contributed to narration of the crisis to a much greater degree than in GE10. They were given a greater platform to influence public sense-making, most notably a position in televised election debates. This aided their challenge to Westminster's ‘resolution’.

The SNP, supported by Plaid Cymru and Green party, challenged Westminster's advocacy of austerity and privatisation, including Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnerships¹⁰², and argued for a ‘socially just’ alternative for Britain (see Sturgeon, 2015a; Wood, 2015). As Marr (in Wood, 2015) suggests, in comparison to Westminster, they formed “a kind of left block”. Their support of each other's arguments (see Bennett in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015), and their commitment to working together toward more progressive goals than Westminster (see Sturgeon, 2015b; Wood in BBC Election Debate, 2015), strengthened their challenge.

Challenging Westminster's construction of There Is No Alternative, the three anti-austerity parties argued that austerity was economically unnecessary and morally undesirable (see Sturgeon in BBC Election Debate, 2015; Wood in BBC Election Debate, 2015). They highlighted that it failed to achieve Conservatives' own targets

¹⁰¹ The polls had (turns out incorrectly) consistently produced results claiming that Labour and Conservatives were tied (see Clark and Wintour, 2015), even on the eve of the election pollsters said it was “neck and neck” and “too close to call” (Hopkins, 2015).

¹⁰² For an analysis of Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnerships see Sawyer (2016).

on debt and deficit (see Sturgeon, 2015b, c) and asserted that economic policies should improve lives and that austerity did not (see Sturgeon in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). The challengers recognised that the exclusion of alternatives from debate was political and advocated increased borrowing and public spending, and much greater redistribution of wealth through progressive taxation.

“Despite what you have heard there is an alternative to the Westminster consensus in favour of more cuts. Austerity is not inevitable - it’s a choice. We can have a future where everyone has access to decent public services, where everyone can have a decent standard of living” (Wood in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015).

The three anti-austerity parties sought to counter Westminster engineered debt and deficit hysteria. They drew attention to the country’s wealth and made historical comparisons to show that the framing of its fiscal position, and claims of the necessity of austerity, were purposefully misleading¹⁰³. They highlighted that the UK had money to spend on Trident during a period of austerity and it was a political choice not to spend the money on health (see Sturgeon, 2015d). They recognised that austerity placed consequences on the most vulnerable but was chosen by the least vulnerable (see Bennett in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015; Sturgeon in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015; Wood in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). For Bennett (2015a), austerity was a means for making “the poor, the disadvantaged, the young...pay for the errors and fraud of the bankers”. The three anti-austerity parties reframed public spending as an investment in the nation’s skills and infrastructure, people’s welfare and futures. They argued that their approach would end the harms of austerity, increase growth, reduce the debt quicker, eventually eliminate the deficit, and ensure adequate funding of the NHS and housing. Therefore, austerity and privatisation were unnecessary and a ‘progressive’ approach was economically and morally preferable (see Bennett in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015; Sturgeon in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015).

¹⁰³ Bennett (in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) recognised that “over the past 100 years about half of it Britain ran a higher debt GDP ratio and no one worried about it very much” and Wood (in BBC Election Debate, 2015) highlighted that “investment was put in to build that welfare state in the 1940s when there was no money in the coffers, when the country’s debt was massive”.

Whilst fewer Scottish residents voted in the election than the referendum, the proportion voting SNP in GE15 was higher than the proportion that voted for independence in SIR14¹⁰⁴. This could mean that a higher proportion of remain voters/ those in favour of BTD' arguments chose not to vote in the election than in the referendum. Possibly, more people might have supported the SNP as a result of Westminster's response following the referendum¹⁰⁵. However, arguably, there was greater support for an anti-austerity and a 'pro-social justice' alternative when it was *not* coupled with independence. Support for the SNP's approach across Britain also suggests that the party's support was driven by a more socially just 'resolution' rather than nationalism¹⁰⁶. Arguably, in GE15 SNP politicians were increasingly supported for being anti-austerity, because immediate independence was not being offered in the election, although the voters were aware of the long-term goal of independence.

Despite alignment over crisis 'resolution', the three anti-austerity parties' results varied. Green party and Plaid Cymru only had small increases in their vote shares; respectively they attained a 2.8 percent and a 1 percent increase (BBC News, 2015c). Regional variations and leader and party variations played their role. The strength and duration of the SNP's campaigning in Scotland, their majority in the Scottish Parliament, long-term 'anti-Tory' position, and Sturgeon's communication of economic competence (for example by demonstrating knowledge of deficit reduction processes) strengthened their opposition. The SNP also received votes from those seeking independence. Bennett appeared more radical, which may have reinforced public perceptions that Green Party was primarily an environmental protest party. As the SNP presented the greatest threat to Westminster's project and power, Westminster definers focused their attention on countering the nationalists.

Still Struggling Over the Dominant Logic of Equivalence

¹⁰⁴ In GE15 the SNP attained 50 per cent of the vote share (BBC News, 2015d) and in SIR14 the SNP led campaign achieved 44.7 per cent of vote share (BBC News, 2014b)

¹⁰⁵ The SNP argued that Westminster's vow made in SIR14 was not being upheld. Westminster had veto power over Scotland's welfare changes and restrained Holyrood's ability to make fiscal decisions whilst only the English could vote for English laws (see Sturgeon, 2015d).

¹⁰⁶ 'Can I Vote for the SNP?' featured in the list of questions most searched on Google by people *across Britain* after the seven-way leader debate (Mason 2015).

To counter the three party anti-austerity challenge and reassert the necessity of austerity, Westminster definers continued to target the SNP's credibility and construct its alternative plan as economically unviable. They again portrayed SNP concerns for social justice as a façade, hiding their nationalist agenda and their *true* objective of Scottish independence, and claimed the SNP were withholding knowledge of planned cuts. Miliband (in BBC Election Debate, 2015) stated, "the other thing you are not telling people is that...you're planning £7.6billion worth of cuts in Scotland". They framed nationalists attaining influence in UK Parliament as a *threat*, that would not only prioritise Scottish interests over the rest of the UK but seek to dismantle the UK (see Alexander, 2015d; Cameron, 2015g, h). Conservatives' posters depicted Miliband dancing to Salmond's tune and in Salmond's pocket (see Perraudin and Mason, 2015). Again Labour attempted to portray the SNP's social justice agenda as disingenuous and Labour's as genuine (see Miliband in BBC Election Debate, 2015).

Sturgeon (in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) countered criticisms of nationalism by emphasising that the SNP would work for progressive change for *the whole* of the UK. SNP definers repeatedly and explicitly stated that a vote for the party *was a vote against austerity and not for independence* (see Sturgeon, 2015e; Sturgeon in BBC, Election, 2015) and stopping austerity was the "top priority" (Sturgeon, 2015f). To highlight the contrast in framings Miliband (in BBC Election, 2015) labelled SNP results "a surge of nationalism" whereas Sturgeon (in BBC Election, 2015) called them "an overwhelming vote against austerity".

A Nationalist Challenge to the Free Movement of People

Whilst UKIP supported the austerity project¹⁰⁷ and the free movement of capital, driven by a 'narrow' nationalist agenda it challenged Westminster's approach to immigration. The party argued that uncontrolled immigration was harming Britain, in particular its public services. It argued for a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, asserting the necessity of independence, the end of the free movement of people and the implementation of a strict immigration policy to address Britain's

¹⁰⁷ Farage (in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) supported Conservatives and Liberal Democrats' blaming of Labour's "out of control" spending, criticised the Coalition's failure to deal with "a dreadful debt repayment problem", and advocated ending spending on foreign aid.

‘problems’ (see Farage, 2015a). For some neoliberals, the EU provided British business with a free market and cheap labour¹⁰⁸ and the Westminster parties supported Britain remaining in the EU, although portentously a number of high status politicians advocated leave. The UKIP challenge and the momentum it achieved¹⁰⁹ were to become the key driver for the referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU and the decision to leave.

Importantly, Farage rejected the free market, only, in relation to migrant labour. A truly neoliberal approach of course would leave the market to ‘self-manage’ migration rather than increasing state regulation. The successful linking of stagnant wages, insecure employment, and pressured resources with immigration was in effect a significant attack on a neoliberal tenet. However, Farage justified his approach through a tenacious interpretation of free, meritocratic competition. He argued that a truly competitive managed system would deliver ‘better quality’ immigrants for the UK, defined as having skills, financial independence, and not having a criminal record or HIV, or requiring maternity services (see Farage, 2015a, b; Farage in BBC Election Debate, 2015).

The popularity of anti-immigration parties rose across the West, including the National Front in France; Golden Dawn in Greece; Fidesz in Hungary; Party for Freedom in Netherlands; True Finns; the Danish People’s party, and perhaps the most concerning for those seeking social justice internationally – Donald Trump was elected in the United States. Anti-immigration focussed populist parties are widely perceived as racist¹¹⁰ and xenophobic¹¹¹ (see Ford and Goodwin, 2014). 48 percent of UKIP voters actually described themselves as either a little or very racially prejudiced¹¹² (see Stone,

¹⁰⁸ For other neoliberals its social, employment, and environmental protections were too restrictive.

¹⁰⁹ Using Continuous Monitoring Data on voting intentions Clark (2016) charted a surge in UKIP support in 2013, and this is reflected in the party’s GE15 results.

¹¹⁰ Racist is defined as possessing a predisposition to view people differently based on their racially determined physical characteristics.

¹¹¹ Xenophobic is defined as fearful or hateful of strangers/ foreigners and therefore showing hostility towards them.

¹¹² As only 26 per cent of the general population described themselves as slightly prejudice, the statistics suggest that UKIP has a high proportion of racially prejudice voters (Stone, 2015b). However, when the 26 per cent were asked if they were racist only 28 per cent replied yes, which shows that not everyone who identifies as racially prejudice identifies as racist,

2015b) and there are cases of UKIP politicians being accused of making racist comments (for a recent example see Rawlinson, 2017).

However, Farage denied that his party was racist and constructed its policies as patriotic aiming to harness working class nationalism (Ford and Goodwin, 2014).

“I am patriotic I believe in this country, I believe in the people of this country. I believe we would be so much better if we controlled ourselves, governed our borders and gave ordinary workers a chance” (Farage in BBC Election Debate, 2015).

The ‘nation’ and ‘country’ over history has become a powerful concept of the right. It is “bound up with imperial supremacy, tinged with racist connotations” (Hall, 1996: 42). As Hall (1996) recognizes, this meaning is not permanently fixed. Over time the left could struggle to break down this meaning and attach a more progressive meaning and use it to attain support for social justice measures (ibid). Farage drew on public dissatisfaction¹¹³ with Westminster, framing himself as distinct from “the politically correct political class” (see Farage in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015), as a ‘straight talking’ man whom ‘told it like it was’. He understood what ‘ordinary British people’ thought, and UKIP policies were informed by ‘common sense’. He was a crusader for ‘ordinary’ working class interests (see Farage in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015; Farage in BBC Election Debate, 2015). He appealed to a public desire for Westminster elites to be less powerful. For him, ‘ordinary’ hard-working’ Britons were fed up of Westminster allowing them to be exploited by ‘foreigners’. UKIP presented their party as understanding their experiences and desires and struggling for them.

UKIP constructed Britain as being invaded because of a lack of control (see Farage, 2015c; UKIP, 2015). Reiterations that people could immigrate from ten ‘former communist countries’ drew upon stereotypes to encourage a perception of Britain as being flooded by poor, low skilled, and therefore burdensome, as opposed to

supporting Van Dijk’s (1998) argument that social actors do not tend to recognise their beliefs form part of an ideology if it is described in a way that is different from their sense-making.

¹¹³ Farage was particularly successful in the interpellation of “older, blue-collar voters, citizens with few qualifications, whites and men” that felt the working were not being adequately represented by Labour and Conservatives in a period of significant social and economic change and who held strong views on immigration and national identity (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 175). He positioned them as moral, as working hard for themselves, their families and their country but not achieving just rewards, including adequate healthcare because Westminster policies facilitated exploitation by the immigrant.

economically valuable, immigrants. In the British EU membership Referendum 2016, UKIP presented a poster of a walking crowd of mainly non-white refugees and migrants with the slogan “Breaking Point: The EU has Failed Us All” (see Stewart and Mason, 2016a). It was heavily criticised, including by Westminster definers, for inciting racial hatred for its close resemblance to Nazi propaganda (ibid).

In periods of wage stagnation and pressures on housing and public services, parties can gain support by identifying blameworthy subjects who become scapegoats of crisis¹¹⁴. However, the subjects are rarely political or financial elites. Rather, vulnerable groups are often the targets, as was the case in the construction of ‘Broken Britain’ in GE10. Anti-immigration populism draws on and develops nationalist nostalgia, and class grievance about ‘them’ taking ‘our’ jobs and applying downward pressure on ‘our’ wages (see Younge et al, 2016). UKIP exploited public dissatisfaction and anxieties caused by neoliberal conditions and channelled them towards immigrants to gain populist support for their pursuit of nationalist ‘freedom’ from the EU. UKIP blamed immigrants for the housing crisis, depressed wages and pressure on the NHS (see Farage, 2015a; Farage in BBC Election Debate, 2015; Farage in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). Othering of immigrants sought to generate public hostility and openness to the physical exclusion of ‘the other’ from Britain. British media reporting of the migrant crisis¹¹⁵ in 2014-2015 particularly by right-wing tabloid newspapers, constructed ‘illegal immigration’ as a major threat to the NHS and welfare state (see Berry et al, 2015). Cameron responded to UKIP by emphasising his own punitive approach to criminals and apathy towards refugees. He advocated targeting “criminal gangs”, “turning back the boats where we can”, and deterring refugees (Cameron in Hansard, 2015a).

Westminster definers’ reinforced the blaming of immigrants deflecting blame from neoliberalism but their framing had the concomitant response of further cuts to welfare benefits, redirecting Britain away from independence from the EU and towards further austerity in line with Westminster’s desired ‘resolution’ (see Conservatives, 2015; Labour, 2015; Miliband in BBC Election Debate, 2015). It constructed a logic of

¹¹⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of how right-wing populist discourses generate fear of the other and the threat they pose to ‘us’ and ‘our nation’ (see Wodak, 2015).

¹¹⁵ The migrant crisis referred to the tens of thousands of refugees and migrants fleeing mainly the Syrian civil war and crossing by sea to enter Europe resulting in many deaths and harmful living conditions.

equivalence between immigration and welfare benefits suggesting that immigrants came to Britain for welfare support (see Cameron, 2015a). For Cameron (in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015), “freedom of movement was always meant to be about the freedom to take a job, it was not freedom to go and claim benefits so those rules need to be tougher, that is not what our benefit system is there for”. In reality, “both EU and non-EU migrants are underrepresented among the key out-of-work benefits recipients” (Full Fact, 2015). However, they are “more likely to receive tax credits than people born in the UK” due to low waged jobs (ibid), but immigrants tend only to be in low paid jobs, for which they are over skilled, in the short term and then move on into more skilled jobs (Carney, 2015). The anti-immigrant narrative had the concomitant response of cutting welfare entitlement for immigrants. Supporting the argument that Westminster parties offered only variations of very similar policies, both Labour and Conservatives advocated controlling ‘problematic’ immigration by stopping child benefit for persons whose children lived abroad (Miliband in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015; Miliband in Labour, 2015; Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015), and Conservatives advocated preventing immigrants claiming benefits for the first four years¹¹⁶ whilst Labour proposed to do this for two years (see Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015; Labour, 2015).

Strengthening their logic of equivalence between Labour and irresponsibility, Conservatives blamed Labour’s ‘opening of the doors’ for ‘immigration problems’ (see Cameron in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015; Conservatives, 2015). To strengthen their portrayal of their economic approach as successful they narrated their own failure to meet their immigration targets by arguing that immigrants from European countries with unsuccessful economic plans were attracted to the British economy (see Cameron in Cameron v Miliband: The Battle for No.10, 2015; Osborne, 2015d). However, in contrast, Carney (2015) expressed he would “dampen

¹¹⁶ Additionally Cameron (in Question Time: Election Leaders Special, 2015) proposed, “anyone coming from an EU country cannot claim unemployment benefit while they are looking for a job...if they are here after six months and haven’t got a job they have to go home”.

down” explanations blaming immigration¹¹⁷ and he attributed low wages to poor productivity and a *British* labour surplus. Many people needed to work longer to afford living costs.

The three anti-austerity parties also recognised that immigrants made a net contribution to public finances (see Sturgeon in BBC Election Debate, 2015) and highlighted the inanity therefore of calling for reduced immigration, which would lead to lower tax contributions (see Wood in BBC Election Debate, 2015). They countered UKIP’s claim that immigrants threatened the NHS by arguing they were necessary for it to function (see Bennett in BBC Election Debate, 2015; Bennett, in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). The SNP, Plaid Cymru, and the Green Party highlighted that scapegoating of immigrants deflected blame from the real causes of pressure on wages and public services, which were government policies including cuts to public spending and reduction of trade union power (see Bennett, 2015a; Bennett in BBC Election Debate, 2015). They recognised that scapegoating the vulnerable removed responsibility from the powerful and legitimised unjust responses (see Wood in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015). The three anti-austerity parties criticised the dangerous terrain onto which UKIP had steered the immigration debate and Westminster had followed (see Bennett in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015) for developing an “anti-immigration climate” (Wood in BBC Election Debate, 2015), and intolerance of immigrants (Sturgeon in BBC Election Debate, 2015). The thesis conclusion explores the dangerous terrain of the crisis narrative.

Conclusion

In GE15 Westminster definers continued to debate with narrow boundaries and offer variations of neoliberal responses. They constructed a façade of difference despite debating only the pace and depth of austerity, the extent of NHS privatisation, and immigrants’ welfare entitlements. Labour failed again to present a fundamental opposition to Conservatives. Westminster successfully shifted the terrain of debate to facilitate neoliberal intensification.

¹¹⁷ Carney (2015) highlighted that there were more older people working, people were working longer hours and this had increased by 500,000, whereas net migration had increased by 50,000.

The narrative largely continued to identify ideologically advantageous ‘causes’ to legitimise neoliberal responses and deflect attention from neoliberal causes. Whilst Labour recognised high spending was a consequence of the crisis, not a cause, they maintained the austerity consensus. Welfare benefit claimants were demonised and shamed for their ‘immorality’ in order to legitimise a punitive shift in the welfare state. Westminster supported UKIP’s blaming of immigration for problems caused by neoliberal conditions, but blamed the levels of immigration on economic success and generous welfare benefits in order to frame the ‘necessary’ responses as continuing austerity and reductions in welfare support. Conservatives’ blaming of public spending for crisis and consensus around the necessity of austerity pushed the agenda decisively towards spending cuts. Significantly less attention was given to banking reform in GE15 than GE10 and deregulation was pushed down the agenda. Extraordinarily, ‘shameless’ ‘exploitative’ welfare benefit claimants and immigrants became targets of responses as opposed to bankers.

Despite its failings and definers’ decisions to slow its implementation, definers continued to construct austerity as successful and encouraged an inaccurate understanding of Britain’s fiscal position. They argued that it was necessary to build ‘resilience’ to future crises. It was also framed as morally imperative. Claims of intergenerational fairness, rewarding those living ‘moral’ lives (defined in accordance with neo-conservatism), and patriotism were used.

Meritocratic principles were differentially applied to justify different responses. ‘The undeserving’ ‘workless’ had to experience the consequences of ‘their failings’ and the ‘hard-working’ had to work hard for less and endure sacrifice for the good of their country, as a moral duty for their fellow citizens, and to achieve the reward of the ‘good life’. In contrast, the banker and the corporation were rational actors working for high remuneration. The negative consequences of their failings were socialised but they were personally and organisationally rewarded for ‘success’ and ‘ability’. Blaming poverty on individual moralities, as opposed to structure, legitimised welfare as re-moralisation. The welfare state was reframed as obstructing claimants’ paths to ‘dignified’ hard-working lives.

Over time, the NHS was constructed as suffering, particularly from underfunding which (in line with the claim Britain had run out of money) the public sector was not able to address. Simultaneously, the framing of private capital as the saviour strengthened. Both enabled Westminster to argue that further privatisation of the NHS was necessary.

In response to the SNP's continued opposition to austerity, Westminster definers continued to frame its alternative as unviable and insist that SNP's claims were a facade to hide its 'true' agenda and presented the party attaining power as a threat to the UK. The following chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the strategies used in the three moments, discussing the condition of hegemony, and developments and challenges since this moment, most notably 'Brexit' and the Corbyn-led challenge to neoliberalism.

Conclusion

Rationalising the Irrational?

Introduction

This conclusion first summarises Westminster definers' key strategies for narrating the crisis that have been detailed over the three previous chapters. It is argued that false, inaccurate, and misleading representations were central to rationalising the 'resolution', and the significance of inaccurate representations of reality and withholding of information in the moments of the UK EU Membership Referendum 2016 and Donald Trump's election as the President of the US is noted. Attention is then turned to discussing the Corbyn-led challenge that has emerged since GE15, and comparisons are drawn with the Sanders-led challenge in the US. The conclusion considers the condition of hegemony in Britain between 2010 and 2015 and after, suggesting hypotheses for the relationship between Westminster narration and hegemony. Ideas for future research emanating from this project are suggested. Finally, the concluding remarks highlight the contribution this research makes to the literature for understanding this period in British history and reflects on the contemporary political moment in Britain.

Framing the Irrational as Rational: The Strategies

"Empiricism and the practices of modern science have bequeathed us a conception of knowledge as derived from the examination of objective phenomena and sense perceptions via experimentation and repeatable processes of verification. However...[the selected crisis resolution suggests] that this empirical model of knowledge is no longer prevalent. Lack of evidence is no longer a hindrance to the further entrenchment of a belief system" (Curtis, 2013: 74).

Neither empirical evidence nor sound social or economic reasoning determined Westminster's crisis 'resolution'. Crisis-causing conditions were reproduced and deepened. Austerity continued despite evidence widely discrediting it. If, using historical and contemporary evidence, neoliberalism is evaluated as a method for successful economic functioning (defined as operating without crisis and delivering good quality of life for all) and the neoliberal 'resolution' is assessed as a means for 'resolving' the crisis (determined by whether it addresses real causes and its ability to move the economy and the public out of crisis as swiftly as possible with minimal harm), they are absurd. On the other hand, if the 'resolution' and the neoliberal project more widely, are viewed as part of class-based project the decisions do assume a rational shape. To maintain hegemony, Westminster definers narrated the crisis to rationalise responses that deepened real causes, inflicting harm and injustice, and

therefore allowed structural flaws to continue (consequently heightening the likelihood of reoccurrence that will perhaps be even more devastating (Kay, 2015; Rajan, 2010)). They sought to disguise an advancement of a longstanding class-based project.

In attempting to achieve active consent or at least acquiescence, Westminster definers restricted debate within narrow boundaries to exclude non-neoliberal alternatives and their merits and reinforce the ‘necessity’ of neoliberal responses. They identified ideologically advantageous ‘causes’ that had concomitant neoliberal responses. Definers favourably structured Britain’s agenda of concern, shifting debate onto more neoliberal terrain. They sought to generate misunderstanding of Britain’s fiscal position to justify responses, and constructed neoliberal responses as moral imperatives. At the same time they countered challenges by constructing alternatives as unviable and immoral, inaccurately representing parties and their ‘resolutions’, and reinforcing an attribution of blame but redirected towards the Westminster ‘resolution’.

Restricting Debate within Neoliberal Boundaries: The Power of Consensus

Between 2010 and 2015 Westminster debate was confined within narrow boundaries, attempting to limit mental horizons and construct a neoliberal ‘resolution’ as necessary. The main Westminster parties did not present a fundamental challenge to each other. They maintained consensus around the necessity of austerity, ‘business friendly’ conditions, including further privatisation of both the NHS and nationalised banks. Alternative explanations, responses and their merits were excluded. For Westminster, there was no real alternative, merely variations.

Westminster debated comparatively minor variations of responses, including the *timing* and depth of austerity, the *extent* of NHS privatisation, and the *number* of years before immigrants’ entitlements to benefits should begin. Definers constructed a façade of major difference, debate, and choice, relying heavily on logics of difference portraying parties as clashing from extreme ends of the political spectrum. Paradoxically, consensus around responses despite supposed ‘opposition’ was used as evidence for their necessity. The absence of a challenge for much of the period aided

this narration. Challengers later in the crisis however, began to contest this dominant and narrow narrative.

Identifying Ideologically Advantageous 'Causes' with Concomitant Neoliberal Responses

Westminster definers attributed blame to ideologically advantageous but false 'causes'. These had concomitant neoliberal responses that obscured the 'resolutions' absurdity. Inaccurately attributing blame to neoliberalism's targets prompted responses that allowed the project to advance. For the most part, real neoliberal causes were excluded from Westminster's blame attribution discourses in order to lower expectations of what would be more logical responses for avoiding crisis and moving the economy out of crisis but which would conflict with neoliberal tenets. Narration sought to obscure the 'resolution's' failure to confront the real structural origins of the crisis and political selection of responses.

Conservatives' assertions that Labour's 'reckless' public spending had caused 'threateningly' high debt and deficit framed austerity as a logical response. The 'unaffordable' public sector, framed as wasteful, encouraging 'dependence' and 'exploitation', became the problem to be addressed with private capital positioned as the antidote. This framing rationalised reductions in the public sector, further privatisation, and the protection, and deepening, of other 'business friendly' conditions, including lower corporation tax, deregulation, and reduced social and labour rights and protectionism.

Whilst media and public perceptions pressured Westminster definers into discussing the 'problem' of the financial industry, their narration was limited to bankers' 'reckless' and irresponsible behaviour. This was not contextualised within neoliberalism itself. Blame for Britain's 'decline' was attributed to the behaviour of those at the bottom of the class hierarchy, dependent and exploitative 'workless' welfare claimants and poor immigrants, rather than structural flaws. Focus on family lifestyles when attributing blame for poverty sought to deflect blame from structural conditions and framed responses, including cuts to welfare benefits, as 'encouraging' 'responsibility'. Public dissatisfaction with falling real wages, a struggling NHS, and a lack of social housing was directed towards the poor immigrant. This framed

withdrawal, and increasing conditionality of welfare benefits as necessary for re-moralisation and protection of both ‘hard-working taxpayers’ and Britain. “Deviant others” in Young’s words became “a scapegoat” “for the systemic problems which society faces” (Young, 1999: 20, 96, 105). Welfare claimants and particularly poor immigrants were constructed as morally distinct from ‘us’ – ‘the hard-working’. Definers operated to generate a further shift away from, in Young’s (1999: 1) terminology, collectivism, “assimilation and incorporation” and towards individualism, separation and exclusion. This encouraged a climate of intolerance and active support of harmful responses, or at least acquiescence. In Hall’s (1979: 15) terminology they were seeking to generate “authoritarian populism”.

In the current phase of “punitive neoliberalism”, “governments and societies unleash hatred and violence upon members of their own populations” (Davies, 2016a: 130). The harms discussed in the thesis introduction and in Cooper and Whyte (2017) evidence the violence of the government’s austerity policies. Whilst neoliberalism inherently supports individualism and often blames the vulnerable for their vulnerability, the denigration of the vulnerable has moved into more dangerous terrain. Adam Perkins (2016a: 140), a neurobiologist at King’s College London, argued:

“a welfare state which boosts the number of children born into disadvantaged households will...undermine the nation’s stock of human capital by boosting the number of children in the population who develop employment-resistant personality profiles”.

He advocated welfare support for children, particularly potential children, should be reduced. For social Darwinists unconditional redistribution hinders the competition from playing out and allows the “survival of the unfittest” (Amable, 2011: 8). Whilst this perspective is marginal, that Perkin’s thesis gained significant media coverage - most notably he published an article in the Daily Mail and he was invited to speak at the London School of Economics (see Perkins, 2016b) - signifies openness to dangerous and previously unacceptable way of speaking about the vulnerable. Protests from students, led to the lecture being postponed, perhaps signifying a simultaneously growing resistance. Conservatives’ ‘two child policy’ means that a family who has a third child from April 2017 will no longer receive housing benefit or tax credits for that child or subsequent children (see HM Revenue and Customs, 2017).

Conservatives have framed the policy, which has “serious implications for reproductive rights and family wellbeing” (Lowe, 2015), as morally imperative to ensure ‘fairness’ for children and ‘hard-working taxpayers’¹¹⁸ rather than as a means to improve the ‘quality’ of the population.

Key political definers have also made comments suggesting that some vulnerable populations are less valuable and that their human entitlements and freedoms should be withdrawn. Nigel Farage asserted that Britain’s immigration policies should protect the country from exploitation by HIV positive immigrants seeking healthcare. UKIP’s campaign poster of mainly non-white refugees resembled Nazi propaganda. David Cameron dehumanised those seeking refuge from war by describing them as a “swarm” (Elgot and Taylor, 2015) a term meaning a dense group of insects, and advocating Britain turn back boats. Whilst there has been critique of these comments, including by other political elites, the growth in support for Conservatives and UKIP when portraying the vulnerable in such ways signifies dangerous terrain.

A strengthening of nationalism marks the current period. UKIP and Westminster’s blaming of immigrants has generated populist support for an exclusionary approach to ‘them’. In addition to the support for Conservatives and UKIP, the vote for Britain to leave the EU is in part a reflection of nationalism and response to ‘problematic immigration’. Nationalism is challenging the free movement of people and demanding more intense regulation of migration. In the US, whilst there has been the Sanders-led movement there has also been a nationalist populist driven challenge to the freedom of movement of people and indeed industry. A fundamental commitment of Trump’s campaign for US presidency was that he would take a punitive approach to immigration in the interests of American citizens. He committed to developing the national manufacturing industry to generate valuable jobs for Americans, an economic strategy more closely associated with Keynesianism than neoliberalism. These may reflect a move away from neoliberal globalism to Americanism (Trump in Berenson,

¹¹⁸ Iain Duncan Smith (cited in Mulholland, 2012) stated, “it’s...about those children growing up in workless households. Their lives are destroyed by this. They need also to learn that it’s the right thing for parents to go to work”. Grant Shapps (cited in Chapman, 2013) stated it was “fair to the taxpayer” because it creates “a choice for people on welfare, which mirrors that which millions of people in work who aren’t receiving state support have to make”.

2016; Trump in Los Angeles Times Staff, 2016). On the other hand, Trump is also seeking to rollback Obama's affordable healthcare policies, part of Steve Bannon's dismantling of the 'administrative state'. His project cannot yet be understood as a rejection of neoliberalism; there are conflicting movements. Moreover, Trump's presidency itself is precarious. Should he be removed from office it may be that a more 'traditional' neoliberal conservatism would be re-asserted. Nationalism, for its part, is already inflicting harm on, particularly poor, immigrants. The House of Commons has allowed 'Brexit' legislation to be passed without guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens living and working in the UK (see Asthana et al, 2017). Recently elected, Donald Trump is seeking to implement Executive Order 13769 titled 'Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States', which suspends entry of people from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, and suspends the US refugee programme (see Lee and Salama, 2017). As the threat of further economic insecurity looms heavy as Britain leaves the EU tensions may become even more acute and responses to the vulnerable more punitive. Britain may be moving into more dangerous terrain.

Structuring a Favourable Agenda, Shifting Debate onto More Neoliberal Terrain

Over this period, neoliberal causes of crisis were minimised, neutralised, or ignored shaping public expectation of responses. Comparing narration between the two General Elections shows that Westminster parties maintained their diagnoses of crisis, framed their responses as remaining necessary, and with greatchutzpah, called for more of the same 'successful' approach. In short, the need for neoliberal 'resolution' and a return to neoliberal normality was asserted in GE10 and re-asserted in GE15.

A comparative analysis of the two elections shows that Westminster blame attribution discourses operated to push neoliberal targets up the agenda of concern. The relatively radical commitments to regulating finance and displacing it from its central position in the economy made in GE10 diminished in prominence as the crisis developed. By GE15, whilst there were still some claims that the state needed to reduce the power of finance they were lacklustre and marginal. Private sector disaster and regulation of finance were not key topics. In sharp contrast, the 'problems' of public spending, debt, deficit and the welfare state dominated, and assertions of the importance of Britain's 'business friendly' conditions strengthened, overshadowing any demands for radical

change. In GE10, immigration was not a key topic of debate but Westminster's endorsement of UKIP's blaming of immigrants for austerity conditions meant that by GE15 tackling the 'problem' of immigration was at the top of the agenda. Westminster definers successfully ensured that the calls for reform and intense regulation shifted from finance and bankers to welfare and immigration rationalising an unjust response.

In GE10 the NHS was low down the agenda. However, by GE15 its underfunding and the emphasis given to its unaffordability placed it towards the top of Britain's agenda. Given the public value of the NHS it would have been difficult to immediately assert that the necessary response to financial crisis was to further privatise the service. Rather the news that the NHS was in crisis and private capital was the only 'resolution' was delivered to the public over the period to optimise likelihood of acceptance of the next stage of neoliberalism's privatisation of healthcare. In Fairclough's (2000) terminology, the ground was prepared.

Definers also sought to shift the terrain of debate even further in a neoliberal direction. This was facilitated by Westminster consensus around key responses. It allowed debate to focus on *extents* of neoliberal responses. Before the financial crisis there was a degree of consensus between Westminster parties around higher public spending levels. However, Conservatives' powerful construction of high public spending as a cause, not powerfully countered by Labour, shifted the terrain of the debate so that the parties then competed by committing to ever greater public spending *cuts*. Rather than framing the welfare state as protection from structurally generated conditions David Cameron was able to argue that it was undignified for individuals to be dependent upon unearned 'handouts'. According to him, the system was *preventing* claimants from living a valuable and dignified life. Westminster parties then competed by expressing their commitment to 'the hard-working' who would be rewarded eventually, as opposed to 'the dependent' who would be disciplined through cuts.

Encouraging an Inaccurate Understanding of the UK's Fiscal Position

Crucially, to cultivate concern about debt and deficit and rationalise austerity Westminster definers disseminated incorrect accounts of the UK's fiscal position and presented misleading comparisons. The public were inaccurately informed that the country had run out of money – that it had met its borrowing and spending limits. The

alternative of fiscal stimulus and/or redistribution and their merits were excluded. This construction was key to positioning austerity and the sacrifices it required as necessity rather than choice. This notion that the government could not spend any more even *if it wanted to* was key to portraying the NHS as unaffordable and private investment as necessary. Definers used metaphors that encouraged the public to make sense of national finances through their understanding of household finances. They told the public that the UK had been irresponsible and needed to change its excessive spending habit and produce a surplus that could form a rainy day fund in order to build resilience to future crisis. These metaphors positioned austerity and its continuation as responsible. Westminster definers sought to generate debt and deficit hysteria by suggesting that the UK's fiscal position was similar to that of Greece, which had, however misleadingly, been constructed as the epitome of national irresponsibility. The major differences between the UK case and Greek case and the fact that the predicament of the latter was intimately related to neoliberalism and disastrously exacerbated by austerity, were disingenuously ignored to generate anxiety as support for austerity. Cutting public spending became the moralising focus as opposed to the regulation and limiting of finance capital, the boosting of a sagging economy, and the remedying of other structural flaws, such as inequality, and low investment and demand.

Despite the evidence that austerity was counterproductive to achieving growth to the extent that the UK's credit rating was reduced¹¹⁹, Osborne was forced to abandon the emergency plan, and that austerity failed to meet 'necessary' debt and deficit targets, Conservatives constructed the plan as *successful*. Osborne did not explicitly recognise this failure or change in his approach. Rather, he sought to generate ignorance, or at least ambiguity, about its failings. Discursively unfaltering, he asserted the Conservative plan for resolution was working and needed to be continued into the next parliamentary term (although the plan was actually modified to a slightly slower journey of austerity). This supports in part Clarke and Newman's (2012: 302) assessment that when it came to austerity "apparent failure [led] not to reconsideration and reassessment but the imposition of more of the same".

¹¹⁹ This contrasted with Conservatives' 2010 claim that austerity was necessary to protect the credibility of Britain's brand.

Framing Neoliberal Conditions as Moral Sacrifices

The case for the economic ‘necessity’ of austerity was reinforced by a proclamation of its moral necessity (see Clarke and Newman, 2012). As Konzelmann (2014: 701) recognises “appeals to ethics and morality” are key tools of those seeking to justify austerity. Working hard whilst accepting sacrifices was framed as fulfilling a moral duty that would enable Britain to make a comeback and the ‘deserving’ (those living their lives in accordance with neo-conservative values) to enjoy the ‘good life’. Social images of British people as hard workers, disciplined towards national and personal goals (see Hall et al, 1978) were drawn upon to argue that Britain was capable (unlike Greece) of patriotic sacrifice. As Clarke and Newman (2012: 307) argue, justifications for austerity tried to use “the memory of post-war collective solidarities” and “rationing, making do, and mending”. Elite definers did not utilise the same framing when discussing bankers’ pay. They were rational actors who required high remuneration to be motivated to operate in Britain’s interests. This framing fostered the injustice of sacrifice being borne by those who did not cause the crisis.

Definers argued that it was morally right for this generation to pay for *its* irresponsibility. The construction of the crisis as the result of the *mistakes of a generation* justified sacrifice being experienced by the many not the few and ‘resolving’ the problem immediately rather than over time. It was framed as morally wrong to pass down deficit and debt to the next generation. Austerity was framed in the working generation’s children and grandchildren’s interests. However, cuts impacted the younger generation. They led to university tuition fees being almost trebled, swathes of economic activity being undertaken on a ‘zero hours’ basis under fixed term contracts, and a rise in child poverty. It was also unfair to ask the previous working generation (who represented a large portion of Conservative voters) to sacrifice, when they had passed down a country, supposedly, in a good condition.

Welfare cuts were framed as ensuring that the ‘moral hard-working’ were rewarded whilst disciplining and re-moralising ‘the immoral’. Sacrifices would be placed on the shoulders of the ‘undeserving’. Moral framings of deservingness were contradictory when narrating banker’s remuneration. Bankers deserved the reward for success but did not require withdrawal of reward for failings. Rather they required a reward to motivate success. There were also attempts to frame welfare benefit cuts as in the

interests of welfare claimants themselves, as helping them attain self-esteem, self-respect, dignity, and a valuable life. Cuts to disability benefit, in similar fashion, were framed as part of a progressive plan to open up opportunities.

Here, I directly address the research questions. Westminster definers' narrative relocated the origins of crisis in public spending as opposed to private capital. This was achieved by framing the crisis as caused by Labour's public spending. It blamed immorality firstly of bankers, and then directed attention towards the 'immorality' of neo-conservative targets. Some blame attribution discourses were more accurate than others but there was a shared commitment to limiting criticisms of structural flaws. Ideologically advantageous causes were blamed that had concomitant neoliberal responses.

Responses then, targeted discursively constituted causes and there was an absence of responses addressing real causes. Responses were framed as economically, as well as morally necessary. Inaccurate constructions of Britain's fiscal position helped to frame austerity and its continuation as necessary. The discourse of success was key to legitimising responses that were not only harmful but were detrimental to economic recovery. To be moral, Britain had to sacrifice and individuals needed to be disciplined and learn the values of individual responsibility and dignity. Debate was limited to exclude alternatives and Westminster restrained the choice to variations of the same responses.

In terms of how the narrative developed, in GE10 and GE15 Westminster continuously and collectively engaged in the strategies. They failed to present genuine oppositions to one another. In GE15 they called for more of the successful approach they had constructed as necessary in GE10. As the crisis developed issues and responses were pushed up and down the agenda, causes that had connected anti-neoliberal responses were pushed down and causes that had neoliberal responses were pushed up. By GE15 banking and financial reform had been successfully pushed down whilst addressing deficit and welfare reform to counter the immorality of the poor were at the top. Comparative analysis of the two elections shows that the ground was prepared for intensification of neoliberal responses. In GE10 Conservatives suggested that public return for privatisation of the banks may need to be balanced against ensuring

competitiveness and by GE15 banks were reprivatised at a loss in the name of competitiveness. In GE10 Conservatives declared a willingness to reduce trade union power if required, by GE15 they were proposing how this would be done. Rarely mentioned in GE10, by GE15 the NHS was at the top of the agenda. The ground had been prepared for further privatisation. The discourse of private capital as public's saviour was applied to the NHS, and the construction that Britain had run out of money framed this as necessary.

There were shifts in debate. Before the crisis Labour and Conservatives competed by committing to spending more, framing cutting spending as responsible allowed them to compete by committing to cuts. Whereas previously, welfare benefits were means to a basic standard of living now for Conservatives 'living on' benefits was no life at all. There were also clear differences in the narratives of SIR14 and those of the elections. In SIR14 the Labour party constructed itself as the party of social justice which was juxtaposed against its claims and commitments of the elections. Similarly, in SIR14 the public were spoken of as collective, they were neighbours and family, which contrasted with the scapegoating evident in the narratives of the elections. Narratives also developed *within* moments. In the SIR14 Cameron eventually produced an embattled language in response to support for the SNP's offering of change. BTD shifted from emphasising the positives of the relationship to the consequences of divorce as support grew and the referendum grew closer. Attention is now turned to Westminster's strategies for countering challenges, the focus of the other research question.

Countering Challenges: The Strategies

As challenges developed, Westminster definers' sought to counter them. The SNP, Green Party, and Plaid Cymru's challenges sought to break the boundaries of debate, identify real, but previously excluded, causes and advocate alternative responses. They struggled to change the agenda and shift debate off neoliberal terrain, share more accurate representations of the UK's fiscal position, and frame austerity and privatisation as unnecessary and socially unjust. In answer to research question three, Westminster definers, to assert the 'rationality', the 'necessity' and 'desirability' of

their neoliberal ‘resolution’, constructed alternatives as unviable and immoral, and presented inaccurate representations of parties and their ‘resolutions’. Also, in response to the UKIP challenge they reinforced the blaming of immigration but their framing strategically redirected Britain towards Westminster’s neoliberal ‘resolution’.

‘Idealistic’ and ‘Unviable’ Visions

Oppositional movements’ plans were constructed as idealistic and unviable. For Westminster, if Scotland were to be independent the absence of a reputable ‘brand’ would mean that borrowing would become incredibly expensive, which would be harmful for national and household finances. Corporations, particularly the RBS, would flee or stay but either way they would threaten the smaller economy. Higher costs would be imposed; again this would be harmful for national and household finances. Taxes would inevitably have to rise, as Scotland would struggle to maintain existing social justice measures never mind fund more, especially as it was relying on declining oil revenues. Borrowing and spending could not increase. The UK was already burdened with unaffordable debt, so the plans of the three anti-austerity parties were unviable. Westminster neoliberals excluded the merits of alternatives’ and asserted that any divergence from the neoliberal ‘resolution’ would always lead to a bad ending. Particularly in the SIR14 INM their narration sought to generate fear and anxiety about the consequences of voting for the SNP’s alternative.

Inaccurate Representations of Parties and their ‘Resolutions’

To encourage a rejection of political parties’ alternative visions Westminster definers inaccurately represented parties. During SIR14, BTDF represented Labour as the party of social justice referring to past progressive achievements in order to encourage those voters who were seeking a socially just ‘resolution’ to reject the SNP alternative. The construction contrasted with Labour’s wider crisis narrative, which, mirroring the Conservatives, appealed to the moral value of so-called ‘fairness’ to legitimise reversals of social justice. This portrayal sought to obscure the Labour party’s dramatic shift to the right under neoliberalism. This was a party after all that chose to abstain on the Conservative governments’ welfare bill in July 2015.

In GE10 Conservatives and Liberal Democrats portrayed their parties as committed to equality, giving particular emphasis to social mobility. However, whilst the personal

income tax allowance was raised, what followed were five years of an economic approach that sharply widened inequality and reduced social mobility. In GE15 Westminster parties competed to be the party of the 'hard-working'. However, their political choices of austerity, further privatisation of the NHS and other public assets, as well as Conservatives commitment to further withdrawing labour rights, contradicted this claim.

BTD capitalised on the fact that the SNP's anti-austerity arguments developed as part of a movement for independence arguing that their 'falsehoods' about austerity were engineered as a façade for their true 'narrow' nationalist agenda. This was also particularly useful for reasserting Westminster's arguments for austerity; if the SNP could not be believed then, neither could their anti-austerity arguments. Seeking to undermine their credibility, they constructed the SNP as attempting to manufacture public ignorance of their true plans, most notably cuts.

Framing Alternatives as Immoral

In the SIR14 INM BTD' narration encouraged emotional sense-making by disseminating deeply moralised constructions. The metaphor of a personal relationship framed voting for independence as an immoral act. It was likened to a parent walking away from their marriage and their family home, leaving their children to an uncertain future, or leaving their neighbour in a time of difficulty. The 'right' thing to do was to stand by your neighbour, your children, and wider family. An independent Scotland was portrayed as abandoning Britain's collective struggle against the 'Tories' and therefore reducing Britain's ability to struggle for social justice at home and abroad. The relationship metaphor, again facilitated by the fact that the arguments emerged as part of a campaign for independence, allowed voting for an anti-austerity alternative to be framed as not truly valuing social justice because walking away did not reflect the values of compassion or solidarity (even though Westminster was advocating austerity).

Reinforcing but Redirecting

In GE15 in response to UKIP's nationalist pursuit of UK 'independence' from the EU seeking to restrain the movement of people, and appealing to anti-establishment resentments, Westminster endorsed UKIP's blaming of immigration and need for a

more authoritarian response. This framing however, was used to argue for further cuts to welfare and to counter the argument that leaving the EU was necessary. They utilised the attribution of blame but their framing sought to redirect Britain away from independence from the EU and towards further austerity measures.

A Deceitful Narrative? Discouraging Genuine Understanding

False, inaccurate, and misleading representations were central, systematic, and ubiquitous. This thesis supports Davies's (2016a: 132, emphasis added) argument that many crisis narratives from above have an absence of both "*critical forms of knowledge, which necessarily represent the deficiencies of the present*" and an "*epistemological or semiotic aspiration to represent reality*".

Genuine understanding about causes of the crisis was not encouraged, and definers sought to obscure the continuation of causes in the 'resolution'. Alternatives and their merits were excluded. Real understanding of the UK's fiscal freedom was not encouraged. Empirical evidence and knowledge about the failings of austerity was withheld, as were Conservative plans for English votes for English laws, and forthcoming benefits cuts. When challengers brought previously excluded ideas and knowledge into debate, Westminster definers discredited both the opposition and the ideas and knowledge they were sharing. Blame was attributed to false or non-causes and the public were inaccurately told that the UK had met its borrowing limit, that higher taxes would send talent abroad, and that economic stimulus was economically unviable, despite ample evidence to the contrary. Parties were strategically misrepresented. Framings, particularly through the use of metaphors and comparisons, were misleading. Unemployment and poverty were misrepresented as the result of an individual's moral failings. Focus was misleadingly deflected away from Britain's structural flaws and towards neoliberal targets. Over the course of the crisis false causes and desired responses were pushed to prominence whilst real causes were pushed down, and moved off, the agenda. Deeply moralised claims framed neoliberal responses as right and necessary for a moral 'resolution'. 'Facts' were shared that were not actual lies but Westminster framings meant they did not reflect, and actually misrepresented, reality. Powerful definers did not encourage genuine understanding. They chose not to share available authentic knowledge representing evidence, chose

to strategically withhold information, and through inaccurate representations misrepresented reality.

At the meso level, it served banks' interests to prevent understanding of financial products, particularly their risks. Uninformed consumers were more likely to buy mortgages they could not afford, personal payment insurance they did not need, endowment mortgages that would not pay out, and they were more likely to invest in hedge funds that bought toxic and potentially valueless 'assets'. At the micro level, Cioffi and Tannin, two former Bearn Stearns hedge fund managers, kept their clients in ignorance of the risks they were taking, causing them to lose £1.6billion when the funds collapsed (Davies and McGoey, 2012). Then, in court, contrary to the evidence, they pleaded ignorance of risks to avoid individual accountability and were determined not guilty (ibid). Rojan (2010: 1) states that "some hedge fund managers and traders in investment banks put their money instead of their mouths to work", only a few financiers openly expressed concerns. Westminster definers, in similar fashion, claimed that politicians and bankers *could not* have predicted the risks posed by an industry that was oversized, narrowly motivated by profit accumulation, and unrestrained by effective regulation. Discouraging genuine understanding can clearly be of significant value for those seeking to protect hegemony of a project, profit accumulation of a corporation, and themselves and others from accountability. Davies and McGoey (2012: 65) suggest, "ignorance, not knowledge, has been the most indispensable resource throughout the crisis".

In both the UK EU Membership Referendum 2016 and Trump's inauguration as President of the US and early presidency, key political definers attempted to deceive the public with a brazenness that was alarmingly reminiscent of authoritarian and totalitarian excesses. Central to the leave campaign in the UK EU membership referendum 2016, was the statement "we send the EU £350million a week let's fund our NHS instead', which was emblazoned on the side of the leave campaign bus (Stone, 2016). This was clearly meant to be decoded as meaning that an additional £350million per week would be spent on the NHS. Before the vote there was no attempt by any leave campaigners to stop people believing this. However, speaking the morning after voting day Farage, both a key player in building support for a referendum and a prominent political figure advocating leave, said the funding could

not be guaranteed and that it was a mistake to suggest it could (ibid). Again, timing of the news after the vote was strategic. In response to a question about why he supported leaving the EU when corporate, including financial, elites were advocating stay, Michael Gove (2016), a Conservative MP and key leave campaigner, declared “I think people in this country have had enough of experts”. He asserted that because the experts belonged to organisations that had advocated the conditions that led to crisis the public were not interested in what ‘experts’ had to say. There is disingenuousness here: an architect of policies that have inflicted harm, injustice, and continued causes, at the same time blames the ‘experts’ and claims common sense ‘alongside’ the victims of the disasters he and his colleagues have wrought.

One phenomenon that has developed is referred to as ‘Trump speak’ (see Douglas, 2017). Blatantly disregarding empirical evidence, US President Donald Trump disseminates falsehoods to gain support for his presidency and policies. Rather than using his resources to attain truth and share it, and in a reversal of the primary/secondary definer relationship, Trump justifies the dissemination of numerous falsehoods by asserting that he is merely repeating news from the media (see Shugerman, 2017). Seeking to legitimise his immigration policy, for example, early in 2017 Trump suggested that Sweden was suffering from refugees’ criminality and when ‘caught’ lying cited Fox News (see Bengtsson and Scruton, 2017). This seems even more absurd given research shows that viewers of Fox News are less informed about international political issues than those who do not watch any news (see Huffington Post, 2011). Whilst Trump blasts mainstream news as ‘fake’, his advisor Kellyanne Conway in the week of Trump’s inauguration referred to Trump Press Secretary Sean Spicer’s, inaccurate statements about attendance at Trump’s inauguration as “*alternative facts*” (see Osborne, 2017). ‘Fake news’ (ironically appropriated by its main exponent), which refers to intentionally fabricated ‘news’ predicated on falsehoods and created *without* an intention to reflect reality, has become a key political issue. Hersh (2004: 3) in a statement that has even greater pertinence now, states:

“it would not be surprising if future generations look upon our era as ‘the age of newspeak’ or doublespeak: half-truths and lies being used to justify policies and actions which are in opposition to established norms of morality and decency”.

In his thesis of inverted totalitarianism, Wolin (2008: 49) argues that in the US and to a lesser extent the UK, democratic principles, including debate and decision-making, appear to be generally adhered to but actually lose their “substance”. There is a “shallowness of democracy” and a “pseudo-democratic” system exists (ibid: 53, 60). Entities become “nominally democratic” (Harvey, 2005: 205). This, should not be surprising, as McChesney (1999: 9) notes: “neoliberalism works best when there is formal electoral democracy, but when the population is diverted from the information, access and public forums necessary for meaningful participation in decision making”. In GE10 and GE15 there were not fundamentally oppositional parties for Britain to choose between. Rather, key ‘oppositional’ parties offered variations of similar responses. Definers debated within limited boundaries whilst those without power and legitimacy in the system struggled to have their voices heard. Transparency and openness were claimed but evidence, knowledge, and information were withheld from official discourses and reality misrepresented. Westminster definers did not facilitate the public making genuinely informed decisions and being able to vote for a party that reflected their perspective.

Change on the Horizon

Since GE15 an oppositional movement to Westminster’s narration of crisis and ‘resolution’ has developed from within the Labour party. Jeremy Corbyn, a longstanding Labour MP, has led a challenge that offers an alternative vision of a full movement away from neoliberal capitalism and towards a political economic transformation that would reinstate a version of social democratic capitalism. The Corbyn-led movement has put ending austerity and investing in public services back on the agenda and, confounding mainstream media commentators, is drawing increasing support. The 2017 Labour Party Manifesto signalled the ending of the party’s support for neoliberalism and its offering of a genuine alternative vision. At the time of writing real cracks have appeared in the edifice upon which the Westminster ‘resolution’ has been built. Part of Labour has effectively detached itself from the consensual ‘resolution’ of 2010-2015 and has begun engaging in real discursive struggle. Dominant consensus in official discourse, which was remarkably resilient over the three INMs, has started to unravel.

Following GE15, voices from within the Labour party, most notably Corbyn and John McDonnell, diagnosed the party's election failure as a result of failing to offer an alternative vision. For Corbyn, the Labour plan "wasn't fundamentally redistributive" despite severe inequality (Corbyn in Hattenstone, 2015). The diagnosis was in significant contrast to New Labour's quite extraordinary explanation that blamed Miliband for being too far *left* despite the failure to provide a real opposition to Conservatives (see Blair, 2015a, d; Mandelson, 2015). This differential framing was central to the battle within the party over its direction that was played out publicly between the aftermath of GE15 until the 2017 General Election.

The emerging alternative Labour narrative comes much closer to the real causes of the financial crisis and recognises the responses that have deepened them, inflicting inequality, injustice, poverty, desperation, and harm (see Corbyn cited in Hattenstone, 2015; Corbyn, 2015b, c; McDonnell, 2015a). Corbyn's moralistic narrative is inverted and located within a structural critique of inequality and deregulation.

"The banking crisis was not caused by firefighters, street cleaners, nurses, teachers, or anyone else in our valuable public services. It was caused by deregulation; it was caused by sheer levels of greed. Whilst taking banks into public ownership was absolutely the right thing to do, the problem was they were not kept in public ownership; the banks were not forced to work for the rest of us in the economy, they were allowed to carry on in their own sweet way. So when it got to the 2010 election we were offering more austerity, more cuts, more punishment on the poorest in this country. David Cameron claimed we were all in it together. I don't think so, David Cameron...I think you think everybody else is in it together except you and your party and the people around you...when we came to 2015 surely we should have been able to offer something more than austerity" (Corbyn, 2015d).

Corbyn and McDonnell have argued that austerity was a *political choice* (see Corbyn, 2015b, Corbyn in Hattenstone, 2015; McDonnell, 2015). Corbyn (2015a) recognised the arguments against austerity:

"the austerity process makes...[the debt and deficit problem] worse because it lowers income, lowers wages, lowers income tax, increases demand on welfare because of the levels of poverty in Britain, and so it actually is a cycle of decline. Surely it's better to invest in an economy, to grow income and grow prosperity?"

Recognising Westminster's inaccurate constructions, McDonnell (2015a) committed to embarking "on the immense task of changing the economic discourse in this country" and "opening up a national discussion on the reality of the roles of deficits, surpluses, long-term investment, debt, and monetary policy". Drawing upon the work of economists, including Keynes, Stiglitz, Piketty, and Blanchflower, the alternative plan was to borrow and invest to grow the economy (see Corbyn, 2015e; McDonnell, 2015a). The strategy included people's quantitative easing¹²⁰ (see Corbyn, 2015f), progressive taxation¹²¹ (see Corbyn, 2015f; McDonnell, 2015a, b) and the permanent nationalisation of banks, railways, energy companies, and full nationalisation of the NHS (Corbyn, 2015a, b, g). Moreover, seemingly in support of strengthening democracy and moving away from dangerous terrain, Corbyn (2015e) called for public "engagement", "discussion" and "activism", and "kinder politics and a more caring society" (Corbyn, 2015b).

Westminster, particularly New Labour politicians, supported by large swathes of the mainstream media, launched a fierce discursive effort to counter, and ideally end, the movement. The critique had two core elements: Corbyn was unelectable as Prime Minister (see Blair, 2015a, c; Brown, 2015; Davies, 2015; Dominiczak et al, 2015; Kinnock, 2015; Newton Dunn et al, 2015) and the alternative vision was an idealistic "throwback" to a period of economic failure (see Blair, 2015a, c). The latter was of course ironic given that Westminster definers were advocating a set of idealisms that even recent history had proved economically flawed.

New Labour MPs, later joined by some of Corbyn's allies most notably MP Angela Eagle, Corbyn's Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills,

¹²⁰ Drawing on Richard Murphy's idea, they advocated the government buy bonds in a National Infrastructure Bank that funds projects such as railway and broadband improvements (see Leftly, 2015). Murphy (2015) argues the policy would allow investment in skills and publicly funded building of schools and hospitals as well as leading to higher wages and higher tax receipts, which are necessary to cut the deficit. McDonnell (2015b) argued that people's QE could be adjusted to prevent too high inflation, and could be more effective in delivering investment, growth, and jobs than banks' QE. Murphy (2015) recognised banks QE had been largely unsuccessful in boosting growth because the money had been used for bonuses and other banks costs whereas PQE would invest in the real economy.

¹²¹ This involved commitments to reinstating the 50p tax rate and a higher rate of inheritance tax, ending some tax reliefs, for example on companies that do not produce enough jobs, and tackling tax avoidance and evasion (see Corbyn, 2015h; McDonnell, 2015b).

instigated a further leadership contest in 2016, only a year after the previous one. New Labour politicians openly undermined Corbyn in an attempt to weaken the power of his challenge. This was explicitly recognised by the architect of New Labour Peter Mandelson's assertion that he "work[ed] every single day in some small way to bring forward the end of [Corbyn's tenure in office]" (Mason and Elgot, 2017). As a result of this movement, the crisis, which at the beginning of this research only ever seemed like it would be a crisis *within* neoliberalism, finally has the potential to become a crisis *of* neoliberalism.

Similarities can be drawn between the Corbyn-led movement in Britain and the Bernie Sanders-led movement in the US. From 2015 Senator Sanders, also a longstanding left wing politician, led an oppositional movement centered on addressing the issue of class inequality that also emerged from within a key political party that had clear disagreement over direction. Like Corbyn, Sanders argued that the political economic approach was not improving the lives of the majority of the public. He highlighted that globalisation had delivered massive profits for the wealthy and decline in working and living conditions for workers. He called for higher education to be subsidised, a universal healthcare system, and progressive taxation (see Roberts and Asthana, 2017). Sanders has himself recognised the similarity of his and Corbyn's movements, stating "there is a real similarity between what he has done and what I did - he has taken on the establishment of the Labour party, he has gone to the grassroots and he has tried to transform that party". Sanders, like Corbyn, has received significant public support, particularly from the younger generation (see Bump, 2016).

The narratives in the General Election 2017 were different from the previous narratives of the crisis (Richards, 2017). Whilst Conservatives in particular continued many familiar arguments and continued to advocate a neoliberal 'resolution', the Labour manifesto had significant breaks. Arguably for the first time in forty years the Corbyn-led movement shifted the terrain of the debate more towards the left (ibid). It struggled to push key social issues up the agenda. Tax rises, social care funding, industrial strategy, a fully nationalised NHS, responding to the housing crisis and food poverty crisis were on the agenda and key real causes of crisis, most notably inequality, and the desperately slow 'recovery' from it became a focus of the narrative.

These developments require the attention of future research projects. The intense narration moments of the two Labour leadership elections, and the General Election 2017 could be subjected to a comprehensive critical discourse analysis to understand the narration and development of the Corbyn-led movement. Narratives, contestation, challenges, countering, and the condition of hegemony over the intense narration moments of the 2008 bailout, GE10, SIR14, GE15, the UK EU Membership Referendum 2016 and 'Brexit', the two Labour leadership elections, and General Election 2017 could be analysed. The shift of a crisis within neoliberalism towards a crisis of neoliberalism could be mapped.

The Condition of Hegemony and Westminster Narration: Some Hypotheses

The purpose of this research has been to examine official discourse. It has not analysed *public* sense-making of the crisis, public decoding of elites' texts, or essentially the relationship between Westminster narration of the crisis and the condition of hegemony. As the theoretical framework explains, political elite narration plays a key role in attaining and maintaining hegemony but the condition of hegemony in Britain cannot be wholly attributed to Westminster narration, or even that of all political elite definers. Public sense-making is more complex than this. This conclusion now considers the condition of hegemony up to 2015 using existing, but limited, research and election and referendum results. Some hypotheses for the relationship between Westminster narration and public sense-making of the crisis, that is to say, the extent of the 'success' of Westminster's narration, are suggested.

Misunderstanding and Active Support: 'Successful' Encoding?

The limited analyses of public sense-making of austerity indicate that Westminster narration 'successfully' generated some misunderstanding of the crisis and active support particularly for welfare reform. Stanley (2014: 21) conducted focus groups between May and October 2012 to analyse sense-making of austerity among "homeowners from middle-income areas and community volunteers from poorer areas". He found that public debt was at the top of the agenda, as opposed to financial crisis or a lack of growth, and there was a belief that austerity was necessary to deal with "excessive indebtedness" (ibid: 22). It was also perceived that the government and households had overspent before the crisis and "there was a mood that 'we must reap what we sow'": *Britain* and the *British* public had to endure the consequences for

prior irresponsibility (ibid: 22). Stanley's research reflects 2010 polls that showed a strong public belief that Labour's 'over-public spending' was the cause of the crisis and in the necessity, and the claimed virtues, of austerity (YouGov cited in Berry, 2015). These findings suggest that Westminster narration had 'successfully' encouraged the public to make sense of the crisis as a public debt crisis, blame public spending and households' irresponsibility, and to believe in the necessity and morality of austerity.

The Trades Union Congress (2013) found that in 2012 "widespread ignorance about spending on welfare, the reality of unemployment, the generosity of benefits and the level of [benefit] fraud" helped to gain support for benefit cuts. The poll identified the following misconceptions:

"on average people think that 41 percent of the entire welfare budget goes on benefits to unemployed people, while the true figure is 3 percent...that 27 percent of the welfare budget is claimed fraudulently, while the government's own figure is 0.7 percent...that almost half the people...who claim Jobseeker's Allowance go on to claim it for more than a year, while the true figure is around 10 percent...an unemployed couple with two school-age children would get £147 in Jobseeker's Allowance - more than 30 percent higher than the £111.45 they would actually receive - a £35 over-calculation".

Discussing the poll the General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, O'Grady, stated:

"it is not surprising that voters want to get tough on welfare. They think the system is much more generous than it is in reality, is riddled with fraud and is heavily skewed towards helping the unemployed, who they think are far more likely to stay on the dole than is actually the case. Indeed if what the average voter thinks was true, I'd want tough action too".

As discussed in chapter seven, many claimants felt shame in claiming welfare benefits and there was evidence of a strong public belief that they should be ashamed (see Hannah, 2016). Rae (2013) also found the public were increasingly blaming individual characteristics for poverty. It seems that misunderstanding of the level of welfare support, poverty and its causes, generated support for a punitive shift in the 'welfare' system. This indicates that Westminster's construction of 'the workless' as

contributing to Britain's decline, the over emphasis on benefit fraud, and the over-representation of a few families who received high benefit payments, and not least, the framing of unemployment as a lifestyle choice influenced public sense-making.

Grudging Acquiescence and Resistance: Successful and Unsuccessful Encoding?

"Resistance ranges from the small, silent and personal through to the multitudinous, spectacular, and momentous" (Stanley and McCulloch, 2013: 4). Some personally rejected the neoliberal project, whilst some have engaged in physical resistance as part of groups such as Occupy and UK Uncut, and/or challenges to Westminster's responses 'resolution'. The number of "strikes, demonstrations and riots" suggests that austerity was not entirely popular in the period (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 309). However, although there was both active support and resistance, between 2010 and 2015 the condition of hegemony was passive consent. Clarke and Newman (2012: 307) captured it as "grudging acquiescence", a passive consent' rather than a popular mobilisation, and for Gilbert (2013: 13, 18) there was "resigned compliance" and "a broadly shared culture of disaffected consent". There was a:

"delicate balance in which consent is (still) being given: there is only limited dissent and active counter-mobilisation...but this consent is conditional and grudging, rather than enthusiastic. It may be compliant (and even calculating). But it is certainly characterised by forms of 'disaffectedness': unsatisfied, uncommitted, disgruntled and, perhaps, disengaged" (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 315).

Mathiesen (2004) has recognised that in addition to coercion people are brought more subtly and silently to order through acquiescence using a range of means (as discussed in chapter five "absorption" is one of those means). Whilst support for emerging challenges was growing, in GE15 those rejecting and resisting the neoliberal 'resolution' by supporting a powerful counter-movement had yet to become powerful enough to successfully challenge neoliberalism. Westminster definers may not have generated widespread active consent or successfully closed down challenges, but they contained opposition over the period. Westminster's failure to achieve widespread active, and positive support for their 'resolution' would come to aid challengers. Clarke and Newman (2012: 308) state acquiescence "leads to both withdrawal from politics and the rise of populist 'anti-political' parties and movements. It produces

increasing cynicism and scepticism alongside new forms of commitment and mobilisation”. Developments since GE15 have proved their accuracy.

Whilst Westminster narration may have sought to generate an inaccurate understanding the continuation of neoliberalism should not be reduced to the idea of a ubiquitous false consciousness or perceived as the outcome of public active support (Curtis, 2013).

“There is still a good deal of what Gramsci called ‘good sense’ around - the conviction that, though, as Mr Cameron says, ‘We are all in this together’, the rich and powerful will do ordinary people over if they get half a chance; and that what corporate spokespersons say in their defence on TV is often misleading, sometimes deliberately evasive double-talk, smoke-and-mirrors ‘spin’” (Hall, 2011: 724).

Whilst “they may not fully understand the problem of capitalist over-production, so many people appear to know that it was the banks and the failures of the financial sector’s watchdogs that got us into this mess” (Curtis, 2013: 74-75).

The perception that political elites had failed to prevent the financial crisis and were then implicated in the 2009 MPs’ expenses scandal was detrimental to Westminster’s credibility. The scandal became a focussing event for growing public dissatisfaction, frustration, disillusion with, and detachment from, Westminster politicians. MPs’ betrayal of public trust and abuse of position drew attention to other problematic actions in British politics, including party funding, appointment of peerages, MPs’ second jobs, and lobbying, corporate posts after political careers, and unsackable MPs. Many people were withdrawn, detached and disenfranchised from, and sceptical and cynical about, Westminster politics (Clarke, 2010a; Clarke and Newman, 2012; Newman and Clarke, 2013). For Streeck (2014: 40),

“among ordinary people, there...[was] a pervasive sense that [party] politics...[could] no longer make a difference in their lives, as reflected in common perceptions of deadlock, incompetence, and corruption among what...[seemed] an increasingly self-contained and self-serving political class, united in their claim that ‘there is no alternative’ to them and their policies”.

Somewhat counterproductively, Westminster definers competed to present their respective parties as credible by accusing others of manufacturing ignorance but

themselves in contrast, as honest¹²². Such competing accusations of ignorance manufacturing may reinforce public perceptions that MPs are untrustworthy and ‘all the same’ engendering dissatisfaction, frustration, and detachment. Individual competition in party interests in this sense conflicted with the overarching project of repairing Westminster’s credibility.

McChesney (1999: 10) suggests that “the neoliberal system” created a “citizenry marked by apathy and cynicism”. It demoralised and generated a feeling of social powerlessness. Some rationalise that resistance is not worth the personal consequences or is not effective (Ross, 2015). An absence of resistance may have been “the result of conformity”, in Lambs’ terms (1975) “a learned belief in the infallibility of authority”, or a belief that [if it does not directly] “affect me personally, why get involved” (Ross, 2015: 368).

Weeks (2014: xiii) argues that there has been a “systematic fostering of ignorance over the last 30 years” about mainstream economics leaving many struggling to be able to “evaluate competing claims about the state of the economy” and obscuring economic reality. Some may have struggled to assess the narrative and responses presented to them, and therefore the necessity and desirability of the ‘resolution’. They may have been unable to evaluate economic arguments and feel unsure about whose claims to trust and therefore, from a position of ambivalence, passively consented.

Research on the topic of public sense-making of this crisis could explore the possible existence of ‘contradictory consciousness’. It could examine whether there was or is belief in both official constructions and, in conflicting ideas: whether Westminster was

¹²² Accusations included gaps between texts and actions (see Clegg in Second Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010), breaking promises in government (see Cameron in First Ministerial Debate, 2010; Darling in The Chancellors’ Debate, 2010), lying (see Cameron in Second Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Clegg in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010) or disseminating false ‘facts’, sometimes framed as intentional and other times as out of genuine ignorance to position them as incapable (see Cameron in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010), misleading the public (ibid) and intentionally withholding knowledge for the purposes of manipulation (see Brown in Final Prime Ministerial Debate, 2010; Cameron in First Ministerial Debate 2010). Definers each proclaimed their own honesty and made moral appeals for others to be honest (see Brown in First Ministerial Debate 2010; Cameron in First Ministerial Debate 2010; Clegg in First Ministerial Debate 2010; Conservatives, 2015; Miliband, 2015e).

able to attain belief in their construction of the crisis and responses despite it contradicting other constructions. In January 2017, sales of George Orwell's 1984 book significantly rose (see Guardian Staff, 2017). Orwell, writing about a political party's attempt to rewrite history to suppress critical thought and generate support for the party's desired normality, wrote of "doublethink, "a form of mental discipline" where people are "able to believe two contradictory truths at the same time" (Pynchon, 2003: x). Introducing the book Pynchon (2003: xi) writes:

"every day public opinion is the target of rewritten history, official amnesia and outright lying, all of which is benevolently termed 'spin', as if it were no more harmful than a ride on the merry-go-round. We know better than what they tell us, yet hope otherwise. We believe and doubt at the same time – it seems a condition of political thought in a modern superstate to be permanently of at least two minds on most issues. Needless to say, this is of inestimable use to those in power who wish to remain there, preferably forever".

Similarly, it has been claimed Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* of 1931 has accurately anticipated the contemporary condition whereby the public are inundated with, and consume, trivial and irrelevant information deflecting attention from key issues.

Westminster definers' consensus around a neoliberal 'resolution' and the absence of challenges for many years seems to be a key reason for acquiescence. Whilst some did not believe in the existing narrative or actively support the 'resolution', they did not have a national oppositional movement with an alternative vision to support. As Leys (1990: 127) argued, "for an ideology to be hegemonic, it is not necessary that it be loved. It is merely necessary that it have no serious rival".

"In the case of neoliberalism, it is clear...that only the core neoliberal elite and key strategic sectors of its periphery (notably corporate management) have to be recruited to any kind of active belief in neoliberal norms, as long as no singular alternative wins widespread popular support, in order for the rest of a population to remain convinced of the unviability of any political challenge to those norms. The result may well be a broadly shared culture of 'disaffected consent', wherein a general dissatisfaction with neoliberalism and its social consequences is very widespread, but no popular alternative is able to crystallise or cohere with sufficient

potency to develop the necessary critical mass to [successfully] challenge neoliberal hegemony” (Gilbert, 2013: 18).

Similarly, Stanley (2014: 16-17) argues that, “without an alternative economic policy paradigm to neoliberalism to choose from, the public have no option but to accept more of the same”. Corbyn (2015h) recognised that many of those perceived as non-political because they did not vote *were* political but there was not a political party presenting an alternative vision that resonated with them. The results of the General Election 2017 support this analysis.

The momentum of the SNP campaign in SIR14, the SNP winning Scotland in GE15¹²³, UKIP rising to the party with the third highest vote share in GE15¹²⁴, ‘Brexit’, and the momentum of the Corbyn-led movement contributing to a hung Parliament in GE17 are all signs of a rejection of ‘there is no alternative’ and strong desire for change¹²⁵. Belatedly emerging challenges are now achieving major public support, which can be conceptualised as expressions of discontent with the Westminster neoliberal ‘resolution’ and its ‘rationalising’ narrative.

In part, Britain’s vote to leave the EU in 2016 can be understood as an expression of public belief in a UKIP led and Westminster endorsed blaming of immigration for conditions caused by neoliberalism, and of public support for UKIP’s challenging of the free movement of people. It can be also be understood as the result of a “long festering discontent with ‘globalisation’” from the working classes (Streeck, 2017a: 10) and as part a struggle for change borne out of frustration with inequality¹²⁶

¹²³ The SNP had its vote share reduced in the General Election 2017 seemingly because of its suggestion of a second referendum on independence from the UK.

¹²⁴ UKIP’s vote share dramatically dropped in the General Election 2017 arguably because the reason people voted for the party in GE15 had been achieved – ‘Brexit’. Paul Nuttall, the leader of the party, (cited in Crampton, 2017) accurately summarised this by stating “UKIP has been a victim of its own success”. The ‘success’ of UKIP led to a monumental change for the UK.

¹²⁵ Challenger movements offered their supporters hope of an alternative. Hope is a core theme of popular left wing parties across Europe, including Syriza and En Comu in Barcelona. After his election Tsipras (cited in BBC News, 2015j) stated, “hope has made history”. The SNP, Plaid Cymru, and Green party also stated that they offered hope in contrast to Westminster elites politics of fear (see Bennett in Seven Way Leaders Debate, 2015).

¹²⁶ Whilst “social and council tenants voted leave”, most leave voters were categorised as reasonably wealthy, they owned their houses outright and had good pensions (Williams, 2016). Middle class England is not as well off as it was, it has a smaller share of wealth because those who are richer take a bigger share and this fuels resentment (Dorling, 2016a). Concerns about

(Dorling, 2016a, b). Dissatisfaction with inequality and a desire for change expressed itself in a decision that has already inflicted harm and injustice on immigrants and will likely place more power in the hands of Westminster elites whose policies have deepened inequality.

“Almost all other European countries tax more effectively, spend more on health, and do not tolerate our degree of economic inequality. To distract us from these national failings, we have been encouraged to blame immigration and the EU...In contrast to other European states, the UK has been systematically underfunding education and training, increasing student loans and debt, tolerating increasingly unaffordable housing, introducing insecure work contracts, and privatising the services the young will need in future ...their ire should instead be directed at the post-1979 UK governments that have allowed economic inequalities to rise so high...and that have placed future generations in peril” (Dorling, 2016a).

Public support empowering the Corbyn-led movement was evident in queues around buildings for his speeches and overflowing rally meetings leading to him speaking to people in the streets. He attained an overwhelming majority in the 2015 Labour leadership election with 59.5 percent of the vote, and 83.3 percent of registered supporters' votes¹²⁷ (BBC News, 2015e). In the 2016 Labour leadership campaign he attained a majority of 61.8 percent (Stewart and Mason, 2016b). It is also evident in Labour attaining 40 percent of the vote in the 2017 General Election¹²⁸ (see BBC News, 2017) compared to 30.4 in GE15 (BBC News, 2015c). Also, in 2017 there was a sharp increase of 43 percent in the turnout of 18-24 year olds compared to GE15 and 63 percent of young people voted for Labour (see Agerholm, 2017). The results evidence that Corbyn “was speaking a language and voicing concerns that a broad cross-section of the public could understand and identify with” (Jacques, 2017). Whilst Conservatives remained (perhaps temporarily) in a minority government following the snap election, support of the Corbyn-led movement has pressured the party to

healthcare also made the additional NHS funding of £350billion per week particularly appealing (ibid).

¹²⁷ Registered voters, of which there were 121,295, are not Labour members but paid £3 to register to vote in the leadership election (see BBC News, 2015e).

¹²⁸ The Labour Party and Conservative party increased their vote share to 82.4 per cent (BBC News, 2017) compared to 67.3 per cent in GE15 (BBC News, 2015c) and the share of smaller parties reduced. Arguably, this is in response to Labour offering a real alternative to Conservatives.

reconsider some of their austerity policies and is encouraging a progressive shift of the terrain of debate and ‘resolution’ (see Richards, 2017). There is evidence that what Froud et al (2010b: 37) termed “a coalition of losers” and an oppositional alliance between those who Harvey (2011: 240) called the “discontented, the alienated, the deprived, and the dispossessed” has formed. In Streeck’s (2017a: 13) terminology, Westminster may be experiencing “the return of the repressed”. The Corbyn-led movement is operating to seize the opportunities of the crisis and Britain it now seems if we are to be optimistic could be at the beginning of the end of neoliberalism. The movement this is to say may have the potential to force a crisis *of* neoliberalism.

Limitations and Future Research Projects

There are related areas for exploration emanating from this research that would need to be undertaken in further projects due to limits on time and space in the thesis. The natural trajectory from this research would be to undertake comprehensive analyses of political elite narration in the INMs since GE15, which in Streeck’s terminology form a ‘new phase’. Given the significance of the Corbyn-led movement, I plan to undertake critical discourse analysis of the two Labour leadership elections and the General Election 2017 INMs. Narration of the ‘Brexit’ INM including the UK EU Membership Referendum 2016 campaign period, its aftermath, and the lead up to and the triggering of Article 50 and the aftermath could also be analysed. Collectively these projects coupled with this research could form a comprehensive analysis of narratives, contestation, challenges, countering, and the struggles of the neoliberal crisis, and the shift of a crisis within neoliberalism towards perhaps a crisis *of* neoliberalism could be mapped.

Another project emanating from the research is an analysis of public narratives of the conjuncture. Stanley’s (2014) research has contributed some knowledge to the area of public sense-making of the crisis. Building on this research, it would be interesting to analyse public sense-making of challenges, and its relationship to Westminster narration of them. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups could be undertaken and participants could be asked to reflect retrospectively on their sense-making in the INMs analysed in this research and discuss their perceptions in the current period. I particularly want to analyse the sense-making of those burdening the heaviest consequences of crisis, for example users of food banks and to examine their decoding

of Westminster constructions and how this relates to their perceptions of lived reality. Perhaps the research could explore how social actors evaluate themselves and their behaviour, and that of others they are categorised with, in a context where government definers construct them as morally inferior. Working in advice and support agencies with people living in poverty, 'clients' have often apologised for needing services and justified their deservedness for welfare benefits or food parcels by explaining they have worked hard and 'put into the system'. There have also been expressions of frustration with dominant representations of welfare claimants. Analysis of their sense-making would allow the exploration of perceptions of individual responsibility and 'deviant' groups, structure and agency.

Closing Remarks

Policing the Crisis (1978) drew upon the work of Gramsci to examine the 1970s conjuncture, narration of the social democratic capitalist crisis, and the generation of support for a neoliberal neo-conservative 'resolution'. The book coupled with some of Hall's other work (see Hall 1979, 1988a [1980], 1988b [1980], 1988 [1987]; Hall and Jacques, 1983) captures the period leading up to the formation of a new historical bloc and early years of its dominance. The work not only contributes ideas that continue to facilitate sense-making of a range of contemporary critical criminological issues (see Coleman et al, 2009), it also provides a critical examination of narration in a major moment in Britain's political history that set the political economic trajectory for decades to come, and it allows the reader to understand the narration of the crisis and the effects it had in Britain during the period.

This thesis has drawn upon the work of Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall to critically examine narration of a different major moment in Britain's political history that is also marked by capitalist crisis. It contributes a detailed critical analysis of Westminster's narration of a 'resolution' that deepened real causes and challenges that emerged before and during GE15. This research contributes to the existing literature a comprehensive, detailed, systematic, and rigorous analysis, of three INMs to develop an understanding of Westminster's strategies for 'rationalising' the neoliberal 'resolution', and seeking to maintain hegemony. Its scope allows it to show which discourses emerged, became prominent and dominated and which faded and were marginalised, the gradual dissemination of ideas and arguments, the timing of definers'

‘news’, the shifts in the terrain of the debate, and a reflection on continuities and differences.

Perhaps, as Streeck (2017a: 14) suggests, there is now a “new phase of crisis”. It is perhaps a period of what Gramsci termed ‘interregnum’, “a period of uncertain duration in which an old order is dying but a new one cannot yet be borne” (ibid: 14). The “new order” may still need “to be created” and what it “will look like is uncertain” (ibid: 14). It is a period of “tremendous insecurity” with “unexpected” and “abnormal” events (ibid: 14). Since GE15, despite it only being a relatively short time ago, there has been a referendum on the UK’s membership of EU resulting in the triggering of Britain’s exit in the next two years, Prime Minister David Cameron resigned, Labour has held two leadership election campaigns electing the same leader, the Conservatives have held one, and reminiscent of Heath in 1974, Prime Minister Theresa May called an early General Election resulting in a minority government. The changes in the political landscape reflect a strong and powerful public desire for change.

The contemporary period may be of momentous importance. Whilst the neoliberal ‘resolution’ continues to be implemented and Conservatives at present continue in government seeking to make neoliberalism hold, there is the emerging possibility that major change emanating from some, or all, current challenges maybe on the horizon. Whether a political and economic transformation will be achieved is still unknown. Britain is in a profound period of political, but also economic uncertainty. Leaving the EU, presents, in combination with continuing financial precarity, the threat of future crises but with a Conservative government in power that would likely be blamed. For Jacques (2017) “the relative economic prospects for the country are far worse than they have been at any time since 1945”. Whilst the Corbyn-led movement has the potential to successfully struggle for a less harmful form of capitalism, Britain, as well as the US, is also experiencing a period in which as Jacques (2017) states, “forces of conservatism, nativism, racism and imperial nostalgia remain hugely powerful”. This constitutes a dangerous terrain upon which to formulate Britain’s trajectory from crisis. There is evidence of support for harsh and harmful responses to welfare claimants and immigrants. The current period further demonstrates the pertinence of Hall’s (2011: 728) comment that “the ‘emergent’...[are] the reason why history is never closed but maintains an open horizon towards the future”.

The outcome of the current struggles will likely determine political and economic trajectories for years to come. For Critical Criminologists seeking to challenge harmful and unjust practices this struggle is important and engagement with it is essential. As Gouldner (1973) argued being on the side of the less powerful needs to be accompanied with challenges to the powerful. We have to be critical voices contributing critical studies of the powerful in support of the less powerful. We have to directly engage, speak truth to power, and challenge dominant narratives that justify and sustain inequality, harm, and injustice. Falsehoods and misrepresentations must be identified, recognised as strategies that form part of a class-based project, and countered. Harm reduction needs to be pushed up the agenda. It is hoped that the analysis of Westminster's narrative contributed by this thesis, evidencing the centrality, ubiquity, and systematic nature of false, inaccurate, and misleading representations in official discourse can contribute to this endeavour. The momentum of Corbyn's challenge in particular, shows the power and potential the dissemination of an accurate representation and challenging of an inaccurate narrative, can have. When I began planning this research it seemed as though the crisis would be definitively contained *within* neoliberalism. Neoliberal hegemony appeared assured, despite the crisis. Now there are challenges that have the potential to make it a crisis *of* neoliberalism. As a critical theorist my pursuit of critical and emancipatory knowledge is currently directed towards contributing to the movement for challenging neoliberalism and seeking a socially just alternative.

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Appendix A

Summary of the Scopes of Existing Literature on Elite Narration of the Crisis in a British Context

Author	Data and time period	Topic
Brassett and Vaughan-Williams (2012)	mainly focussed on media reporting but included Gordon Brown’s 2008 speech to the Lord Mayor’s banquet	constructions of trauma and traumatic events
Burchardt (2011)	the 2010 Spending Review, Osborne’s 2010 spending review speech, Cameron’s speech to the 2010 Conservative party conference, Clegg’s speech to the 2010 Liberal Democrats party conference	constructions of fairness

Clarke and Newman (2012)	two 2009 speeches by Cameron on austerity and the 'Big Society', a 2010 speech by Cameron on debt and deficit, Cameron's statement on the 2011 'riots'	constructions of morality to gain consent of austerity
Connor (2010)	The Welfare Reform Act 2007, a 2008 DWP publication on employability, and the DWP 2008 public consultation titled 'No One Written off: Reforming Welfare to Reward Responsibility – Public Consultation'	legitimising neoliberal welfare reform for disabled persons
Dorey (2009)	Cameron's texts committing to 'modernisation' in 2007, a 2008 Conservative publication on banking reform, a 2008 Conservative document on a plan for a strong economy, a BBC Radio 2 interview of David Cameron in 2009 on the free market, as well as some of Cameron's and the Conservatives' pre-crisis texts in 2001, 2003, 2005	the shift in Cameron's Conservative party's economic policy
Fairclough and Fairclough (2011)	the 2008 pre-budget report	practical reasoning in political texts
Fairclough and Fairclough (2012)	Alistair Darling's 2008 Pre-Budget Report, George Osborne's 2010 Emergency Budget Report, and a House of Commons debate on tuition fees	legitimising responses
Finlayson (2010)	Cameron's 2009 Hugo Young lecture and his speech at the Conservative Party conference	Conservatives attribution of blame to 'big government' and public irresponsibility
Fox (2015)	Cameron's statement following the results of the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014	patterns of words in the Scottish Independence Referendum
Froud et al (2010a)	Bischloff and Darling's (2009) report, the Wigley (2008) report, the Banking Reform Act, a 2009 White Paper on financial reform,	financial regulation

	summer 2009 speeches by Mervyn King, Governor of Bank of England and Andy Haldane, Chief Economist at Bank of England and a selection of texts by Lord Turner, who at the time was the Chairman of the Financial Services Authority	
Froud et al (2010b)	a selection of Treasury Committee inquires, reports and evidence submitted to the Treasury, a 2008 Governor's speech at the Mansion house, a UKFI report and a speech by Haldane, all published between 2007 and 2009	financial reform
Gamble (2015)	Osborne's 2010 Mais Lecture and 2010 Spending Review Statement, Alistair Darling's book published in 2011	the framing of austerity as statecraft
Hancock et al (2012)	a 2007 Centre for Social Justice document titled 'Breakthrough Britain', two 2008 speeches by Grayling on Broken Britain and shameless parents, a 2009 and 2010 speech on 'Big Society' by Cameron, a 2010 Cabinet Office document on 'Big Society', a 2010 Conservative party document on 'Big Society', a 2011 White Paper on open public services, a 2011 Confederation of British Industry press release on public service reform, , the Localism Act 2011, the Job Seeker's Allowance Regulations 2011	the construction of community
Littler (2013)	Cameron's 2012 and 2013 Conservative party conference speeches	constructions of meritocracy
Makay (2015)	a video advertisement by Better Together UK in the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014	multimodal legitimation
Mooney and Hancock (2010)	a DWP policy document on Universal Credit and another on changes to local housing	the representation of welfare claimants as part

	allowance both published in 2010, two newspaper articles by Iain Duncan Smith both published in 2008, and another by Cameron also published in 2008	of the wider construction of 'Broken Britain'
Pantazis (2016)	2015 budget, Osborne's 2012 Conservative conference speech, Iain Duncan Smith's 2011 and 2014 Conservatives conference speeches, two Iain Duncan Smith 2014 speeches on welfare, two 2010 HM Government publications, three speeches by Cameron published in 2006, 2009, and 2012	Framing of poverty
Pritchard (2009)	a selection of speeches by Gordon Brown, Alistair Darling, and Mervyn King disseminated between April 2008 and March 2009	blame attribution in the financial crisis
Sage (2012)	a 2011 White Paper titled 'Open Public Services', a 2009 speech by Cameron on 'Big Society', the 2010 Conservative manifesto, the Universal Credit policy document 2010, a 2011 newspaper article by Miliband on 'Big Society'	'Big Society' and 'Blue Labour'
Slater (2011)	the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) 2006 report chaired by Iain Duncan Smith titled 'Breakdown Britain', a 2010 speech and interview by Iain Duncan Smith, the Welfare Reform Bill, a speech by Cameron on the 2011 'riots', and a 2011 newspaper article by Cameron	Cameron and Duncan Smith's use of CSJ 'findings' to legitimise Conservatives' approach to welfare reform
Slater (2012)	a selection of Iain Duncan Smith's Centre for Social Justice publications between 2004 and 2009, and his DWP publication on Universal Credit in 2010	manufacturing of ignorance to structural causes of poverty and to alternatives
Stanley (2014)	Cameron's and Osborne's speeches on austerity between September 2007 and March 2011	legitimising austerity

Thompson (2009)	this paper does not appear to be supported by empirical research	blame attribution in the early years of the conjuncture
Tombs (2016a)	the 2008 Treasury Committee's Press Statement on the Banking Crisis Inquiry, the House of Commons Regulatory Reform Committee ninth report 2009 and the government response, House of Commons Treasury Committee 2009 Banking Crisis fifth, ninth, seventh, fourteenth reports, Alessandri and Haldane's 2009 Bank of England speech titled 'Banking on the State', a 2010 Conservative Policy Paper on 'Better Regulation', the 2010 Labour party manifesto, the 2010 Coalition Emergency Budget, Osborne's 2010 Conservative party conference speech, Miliband's speech on fairness 2010, Miliband's Institute for Public Policy Research keynote speech 2011, an article written by Miliband in the Observer in 2011, Cameron's 2011 Conservative conference speech, Cameron's 2011 'riots' speech, Cameron's 2012 pro-business speech, the House of Commons and House of Lords 'Changing Banking for Good' Report 2013	framing of the crisis to legitimise the continuation of the anti-regulation approach to private capital
Walsh (2016)	Darling's budgets between 2007 and 2010	representations of the economy after the financial crisis
Wiggan (2011)	the 2007 and 2009 Welfare Reform Acts, a 2009 Work and Pensions Committee report, George Osborne's 2009 speech to the think tank Demos, a 2009 speech on welfare reform by the Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, House of Commons debate on the Welfare Reform Bill, a 2010 speech by the Minister for Welfare Reform, a	the impact of Conservative thinking on the policy area of welfare to work

	<p>2010 speech by Iain Duncan Smith on welfare reform, a 2007 and two 2008 DWP reports on welfare reform, a 2008 Green Paper titled 'Work for Welfare', two Centre for Social Justice reports on welfare reform, Cameron's 2009 speech to the World Economic Forum at Davos, Cameron's 2009 'Big Society' speech, Cameron's 2009 speech to the launch of the 'Progressive Conservatism' project and several publications by Philip Blond between 2008-9, the 2010 Conservative Party manifesto, a 2010 Conservative document titled 'A New Economic Model: Eight Benchmarks for Britain', and another titled 'Power to Public Sector Workers', a 2008 Conservative Party report titled 'Making British Poverty History', and a 2009 Conservative party press release titled 'Get Britain Working: Conservative proposals to tackle unemployment and reform welfare'</p>	
Wiggan (2012)	<p>a 2008 Conservative Green Paper titled 'Work for Welfare', a 2008 DWP oral statement and DWP document on reforming welfare, a 2010 Conservative document titled 'A New Economic Model', a 2010 DWP document on Universal Credit, two 2010 Iain Duncan Smith speeches one on Universal Credit and another on welfare reform, a 2010 HM Treasury notice titled 'Action to Tackle Poor Value for Money and Unfunded Spending Commitments', the 2010 Spending Review, a 2010 Green Paper titled '21st Century Welfare' and a 2010 White Paper called 'Universal Credit: Welfare that Works', the 2011 budget, and the Labour party manifesto 2010</p>	<p>constructions of social security to legitimise the intensification of a neoliberal approach</p>

Appendix B

Primary Sources Listed by Intense Narration Moment and Outside Intense Narration Moments

General Election 2010

Ask the Chancellors (2010) Channel 4 29th March 2000 hrs

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